

"BRINGING BEAUTY HOME TO THE POOR": WOMEN, THE GARDENESQUE,  
AND THE DOMESTICATION OF LANDSCAPE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY  
BRITISH CULTURE

By

MICHELLE SIPE

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Michelle Sipe

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Like the Victorian woman herself, the Victorian garden has often been sentimentalized by British historians and literary critics as a retreat from urbanization, a lush, verdant escape from the pressures of modernity, or sensationalized as a space of sexual promiscuity and danger where natural forces have their sway. To counter these representations, my dissertation explores in women’s “domestic” novels and the non-fiction writings of Jane Loudon and Octavia Hill how the garden and gardening function as a dynamic space and medium for the middle classes to respond to the challenges of industrialization and modern life. In particular, the project examines how women in both practical literature such as gardening and landscaping manuals and domestic fiction use the garden as a site for the cultivation of subjectivity, as a productive extension of the domestic sphere, and as a means to claim a tutelary relationship to the working-classes.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes the quality of light, the question of social visibility, the power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression. -Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation"

The dissertation project draws upon a rich body of scholarship on landscape as a political and cultural nexus of British identity. This tradition includes but is not limited to Raymond Williams' seminal study, *The Country and the City*, on the role of landscape in British culture's shifting meanings of country and city, Gillian Rose, Susan Morgan, and Elizabeth Bohls' feminist analyses of the entwined patriarchal and imperial underpinnings of landscape aesthetics and geography, and Ann Bermingham and Elizabeth Helsinger's Marxist readings of British landscape painting and rural class relations.<sup>1</sup> Readings of late eighteenth and nineteenth-century British landscape, however, have tended to privilege and critique a picturesque aesthetic, one predicated upon an aristocratic, masculine relationship to land and leisure. This focus has, to a large extent, eclipsed nineteenth-century middle-class women writers and figures' emphasis on the utility of landscape as a medium for managing class relations, and their refashioning of the British garden as a critical tool for extending women's management of the social body; indeed, their literary interventions tell a different story, revealing a complex revisioning and appropriation of landscape husbandry and aesthetics for their own purposes.

Whether referring to suburban, private gardens of the well-to-do, or public gardens intended to provide recreational space and instruction for the working classes, social histories of the Victorian garden have tended to overlook women's pivotal role in the cultivation of its many forms. For example, historians of suburban development and middle-class culture such as Robert Fishman, Leonore Davidoff, and Catherine Hall have categorized middle-class landscape pursuits as conservative retreats from the pressures of modern life.<sup>2</sup> In their otherwise comprehensive study of middle-class private life, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall suggest that nineteenth-century women are relegated to suburbia as a means to showcase and bolster men's presence in the public sphere. However, their study overlooks the predominance of a feminine taste for the garden and gardening, and the extent to which women used these media for individual expression as well as social action. In his comparative history of suburbia in England, France, and the United States, Robert Fishman unequivocally treats the suburban development as an assertion of middle-class entitlement and retreat, in which women play a passive or invisible role. Along these lines, cultural historians have generally treated the garden as a commercial appropriation of a more authentic landscape rooted in a pre-industrialized England.

Like the Victorian woman herself, the Victorian garden has often been sentimentalized as a retreat from urbanization, a lush, verdant escape from the pressures of modernity, or sensationalized as a space of sexual promiscuity and danger where natural forces have their sway. To counter these representations, my dissertation explores in women's "domestic" novels and the non-fiction writings of Jane Loudon and Octavia Hill, how the garden and gardening function as a dynamic space and medium for the

middle classes to respond to the challenges of industrialization and modern life. In particular, the project examines how women in both practical literature such as gardening and landscaping manuals and domestic fiction use the garden as a site for the cultivation of a rational, rather than sentimental feminine subjectivity, as a productive extension of the domestic sphere, and as a means to claim a tutelary relationship to the working-classes. While landscape as a political and cultural construct has been recognized as a central locus of British identity, the smaller, more feminine suburban gardens of the nineteenth century and the rise of gardening have often been overlooked in the study of landscape and British culture, indeed subsumed by a masculinist tradition of landscape politics. This perception has consistently obscured women's agency in the cultivation of the Victorian garden and gardening practices, their securing of outdoor spaces as sites for self-making and social intervention.

Although feminist critiques of British culture like Nancy Armstrong's and Mary Poovey's have repositioned the Victorian domestic sphere as central to rather than separate from or peripheral to the public sphere, this reorientation has focused almost exclusively on the home, the interior and the internal, rather than the external landscape and the garden.<sup>3</sup> Missing from this complication of public and private, urban and rural, I believe, is the particular middle-class development of a "gardenesque" aesthetic, a term coined by the celebrated Scottish landscape architect, John Loudon, that appealed to a predominantly middle-class readership invested in cultivating a productive domestic sphere that signified their class mobility and proprietorship. While the eighteenth-century picturesque tradition was associated with England's aristocratic country houses and

estates, their great beauty but also their excess, the gardenesque represented the new middle classes' more practical, industrious, and domestic relationship to land and leisure.

While John coined the term gardenesque, however, his wife Jane's work was most emblematic of its use and appropriation in the early Victorian period. Jane Loudon's extensive writings on gardening for women made English landscape useful, accessible, and profoundly relevant to women of her class. Beginning her study of horticulture and botany under the tutelage of her husband, she became the first woman writer to claim the suburban garden as a place for the active, physical development of feminine taste in landscape gardening and design in her practical 1840 guide, *Gardening for Ladies*. This deceptively modest book, I argue, marks a profound shift in the use and meaning of landscape in the early Victorian era, for it shows how within the middle-class domestic sphere, an ostensibly feminine space, English landscape—its older associations with English identity, its demarcation of citizenship, the capacity for private ownership, and romantic individualism—becomes a new cultural medium for women's self-expression and social participation. Jane Loudon's popular books on women's gardening, botany, and natural history suggest that unlike the socially irresponsible, aristocratic, and masculine tradition of the picturesque, middle-class women were better cultivators and disseminators of landscape aesthetics because they were more attuned to the serious, industrious mood of the middle classes as a whole.

Women's stewardship of gardenesque values provides another dimension to the study of Victorian landscape by illuminating the role of the domestic sphere in its production. As the scholarship of Elizabeth Langland, Mary Poovey, and Nancy Armstrong has illuminated in a range of complex ways, a feminized domestic sphere and



the home itself became central to the construction of middle-class identity, and its expanding social and political power.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, as Pamela Gilbert has argued in her reappraisal of Habermas and Mary Poovey's notion of "the social" as a feminized domain for engaging and shaping the discourse of public debates and concerns, women used a maternalist ideal to claim expertise in housing reform and social work.<sup>5</sup> Along these lines, I argue that the middle-class appropriation of the garden also heralded an expression of taste specific to women, which they cultivated as a means to extend their domestic expertise into broader cultural and social milieus.

As both Marxist and postcolonial critics have demonstrated, representations of the English countryside, whether in paintings, treatises, travel narratives, poems or novels, and landscape as an aesthetic category and practice, are inseparable from the construction and performance of national and class identities. Raymond Williams emphasizes the nostalgic thrust of rural representations that tend to palliate or merely obscure social anxieties provoked by the enclosure acts in particular, as well as capitalism's more general and pervasive remaking of rural and urban spaces through industrialization and the ideology of progress. Similarly, Ann Bermingham has pointed out the correspondence between "the aesthetics of the painted landscape and the economics of the enclosed one."<sup>6</sup>

Detailed studies and histories of the 1790's picturesque "paper wars," spirited debates about the distinctions of English landscape theory and design from its European counterparts, support these crucial insights as well as demonstrate the masculine nature of landscape aesthetics and masculinist constructions of national and class identity. The debates over "agreeable prospects" and how best to achieve them seem to consistently

reflect masculine concerns of ownership and property management. Indeed, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, nearly all treatises on the picturesque and the English garden are written by and assume a masculine subject with the economic means, social position, and defining vision necessary to carry out the abstract principles of landscape aesthetics, as William Repton, Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price were able to do on their own country homes and estates.

Hence, the garden wars were not just debates about what constituted natural beauty, agreeable prospects, or the superior garden; rather, they were also passionate debates about England's nature or character in general and English masculinity in particular. As John Dixon Hunt's work has anthologized, eighteenth-century Englishmen celebrate a landscape aesthetic that mirrors individual autonomy and developing notions of privacy in marked contrast with the overtly public, totalitarian nature of the French garden, with its strict emphasis on symmetry and order.<sup>7</sup> Often understood as an external or exterior concept and practice, a fundamental feature of eighteenth-century landscape aesthetics is the extension of the masculine self, anchored in the country house, to surrounding spaces, enfolding those spaces and defining them within the context of social privileges afforded by individual land ownership. In other words, the social function of private, interior spaces (such as the gallery that displays lineage, wealth, and power) is imprinted on external spaces: from the surrounding gardens, parks, groves, and hunting grounds, to the villages and fields beyond. Such extensions of private ownership were also, of course, secured through the aristocratic tradition of European travel, in which "The country estate gave local form to the souvenirs of the Grand Tour."<sup>8</sup> Through the imposition of the

owner's gaze, masculine aesthetic constructions reach beyond national borders to appropriate and colonize foreign landscapes as well.

Within English borders, Ann Bermingham and John Barrell have argued that landscape and its discourse reflect an ideology of exclusion that enabled a hegemonic landed aristocracy to dominate both land and its inhabitants through the systematic enclosure and displacement of the very people who often formed the stock figures of rural landscape paintings—cottagers, farmers, and rural laborers. Marxist revisions of landscape as well as the more general debate about its politics in late eighteenth and nineteenth-century British culture have focused on the painting as the predominant genre—the source and reflection of the landed gentry's power. The cult of the picturesque, in particular, has been the focus of Bermingham's critique, which posits the aesthetic as the product of a nostalgic longing for a pre-industrial landscape that was quickly disappearing:

Though the picturesque idealized a nature that was in fact rapidly vanishing, its perspective was not simply nostalgic or backward looking. If the picturesque was a refuge from the agricultural revolution, it was also an aesthetic response to some of its effects. For example, Price found "hovels, cottages, mills and the insides of old barns" picturesque. Similarly, picturesque objects were "to be found among the wandering tribes of gypsies and beggars, who in all the qualities that give them that character, bear a close analogy to the wild forester and worn-out cart horse, and again to the old mills, hovels, and other inanimate objects of the same kind." In comments like these, the aesthetic effect of the picturesque seems to be calculated precisely on poverty and misery.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, the landscape theorists' and painters' denial of the interior, everyday reality of the cottagers they found so aesthetically pleasing from a distance would become a repeated object of critique in public debates on the Condition of England in the 30's and 40's, among intellectuals, writers, and observers of rural poverty, as Beth Tobin has observed.<sup>10</sup>

As several critics, most notably Kim Michasiw, Stephen Daniels and Charles Watkins, have pointed out, however, Bermingham's position assumes a unified, consistent understanding and use of the picturesque and landscape aesthetics in culture-building, a position that forecloses the particularities of class, gender, and political allegiances that structure competing interpretations and productions of these aesthetic categories.<sup>11</sup> Drawing upon Bourdieu's observation that "to the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools, or periods, corresponds a socially hierarchy of consumers," Michasiw counters a universalized or monolithic landscape aesthetic controlled by a landed gentry:

That is, the massive claims of the aesthetician tend, by way of reflux, to lead the critic to forget that any class is divided among and against itself and that its interests are not homogenous. Accordingly, Bermingham's assurance that the picturesque serves the interest of the gentry suggests a uniform gentry armed with a uniform aesthetic.<sup>12</sup>

Also complicating the class origins and applications of landscape discourse, Elizabeth Bohls has insisted on positionality, the conditions of gender and class, in which "aesthetics occupied a gray area between the 'high' and the middlebrow...the boundary between high theoretical aesthetics and more popular or applied writing" in British culture.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Michasiw's examination of William Gilpin's travel literature as representative of a bourgeois picturesque tourism at odds with a more elite school of landscape aesthetics introduces class as a destabilizing feature of the original debate of the late eighteenth century as well as current assessments of landscape aesthetics and the picturesque as a unitary category.

Along these same lines, Daniels and Watkins have complicated our understanding of the influential turn-of-the century picturesque theorist, Uvedale Price, and his aesthetics. They argue that his dual status as a resident landowner and aesthete led him to practice a type of landscaping that sought to balance local interests and responsibilities with more abstract theories of beauty and the picturesque. Thus, while celebrating the dilapidated cottage in his formal treatise, "Essay on the Picturesque," he was a careful, attentive squire at Foxley in Herefordshire, who managed and reshaped his estate in "piecemeal, pragmatic, local" fashion, effectively balancing agrarian concerns with aesthetics.<sup>14</sup> Daniels and Watkins point out that landscape improvement was never merely an aesthetic concern for Price, but a process that joined interests in scientific progress and agricultural productivity, as well as class pacification and harmony. Price's practice of landscape husbandry on his own estate contradicts his own polemics on natural beauty and the picturesque and highlights the characteristics of a more middle-class' interest in "improving" a peopled landscape, a concern with cultivating the values of privacy and individualism that women later harness in their attention to and development of a healthy domestic sphere in Victorian culture.

These masculinist constructions of landscape aesthetics have, in turn, been extensively analyzed by feminist critics who have mapped out the gendered politics of these spatial activities and relationships--in which the aesthetic male subject positions women as passive objects within the landscape--often conflating them with Nature and positioning them as the imaginative ground for identity and self-making. According to traditional feminist critique, women, the feminization of land, and those who work the

land function as metonyms for the gentleman's rural retreat, anchoring male privilege and traditional social hierarchies.

For example, in her study of early nineteenth-century women's travel accounts, Elizabeth Bohls has stressed women's marginalization within aesthetic discourse of the period. She partly attributes this exclusion to the characteristic features of formal eighteenth-century aesthetic treatises by Joseph Addison, William Gilpin, and Uvedale Price, which emphasize "the display of a powerful abstracting impulse" and "the denial of the particular," qualities that, she writes, "enforce the distinction between those positioned within the masculine 'Universal', and thus granted the authority of the aesthetic subject, and those whose 'particularity' excludes them."<sup>15</sup> While emphasizing the instability of the garden as a site of enclosure in Mary Shelley and Dorothy Wordsworth's journals, Jacqueline Labbe remains focused on the gendering of landscape without addressing the class politics of women's engagement with landscape.<sup>16</sup> Claiming that the garden represents both women's "properly encircled, properly 'genteel'" enclosure, and a "less decorous space . . . to subvert, obstruct, or transgress gentility," Labbe reads landscapes and gardens strictly as sites of a gendered power struggle.<sup>17</sup> In contrast with the male poet's claiming of objective prospects or sublime, "craggy heights," she argues, women's "landscape-dwelling constitutes a side-by-side existence with the detail."<sup>18</sup> However, complicating women's gendered position as inhabitants of landscape rather than distanced observers, I believe, is their proximity to the working classes, a placement that authorizes their role as disseminators of middle-class tastes for domestic order, industry, and self-discipline.

If the picturesque and the sublime were enjoyed by the objective, detached male observer who could ostensibly stand outside of the landscape and its social relations, I argue that the cultivation of the gardenesque was distinguished by the socially-observant, middle-class woman whose more practical aesthetic included a healthy skepticism vis-à-vis the solitary picturesque travellers of Wordsworth's and Shelley's imagination. While women do emphasize English landscape's association with individualism and autonomy, but this emphasis is directed outwards and deployed in order to inculcate these values in the working classes. As the designated proprietesses of the domestic sphere, women use landscape as a medium in practical, household manuals, children's literature, and the novel to cultivate habits of thrift, discipline, and self-improvement in the middle classes, as well as to extend domestic space and the feminine discourse of domestic management to the working classes and urban space. Furthermore, this feminine appropriation of landscape included the celebration of gardens, both public and private, and encouraged women's interior travel within national borders by positing England itself as a garden for large-scale social improvement.

My dissertation, then, seeks to show how nineteenth-century women's tasteful yoking of the landscape and the home through the cultural arena of the suburban garden contributed to the consolidation of middle-class domestic ideology in the Victorian era. Part of this consolidation, I argue, was achieved through middle-class women writers' challenges to and break with aristocratic landscape aesthetics, the perceived solipsism of the solitary picturesque traveller of Gilpin's ilk, and the Romantic excesses associated with the sublime. From Elizabeth Hamilton's novel of rural reform, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808),<sup>19</sup> to Elizabeth Gaskell's and George Eliot's seemingly retrospective

novels, *Wives and Daughters* (1866)<sup>20</sup> and *Middlemarch* (1871),<sup>21</sup> women novelists use domestic discourses of sympathy and the homely details of everyday life to critique the alienating social effects of the picturesque aesthetic, one that represented both aristocratic excess and paternal neglect. However, women writers do not just use domestic discourse to critique this tradition; they use the middle-class concerns for frugality, self-improvement, and education to promote women as “inscapers,” improvers of British culture and managers of class relations.

The larger goal of my project is to show how women novelists throughout the nineteenth century appropriate masculine ideals of landscape husbandry, work that frames their access to spaces that either expand or exceed the confines of the home: from the lady's parlor to the flower garden, to the spatial configuration of the working-class household indoors and outdoors, to schools and philanthropic institutions, and to the social architecture of the city. Through these appropriations, nineteenth-century women actively shape a range of cultural, national, and institutional spaces, and perhaps most significantly, the more spatially diverse and fluid spheres of intellectual thought and public debate. These spatializing activities constitute what I am calling “inscaping,” activities that take as their condition of possibility the masculine production of landscape and its practices of feminine enclosure, particularly in their representations of the English working classes and “the poor.” As the epigraph shows, I have borrowed this term from Homi Bhabha, whose postcolonial examination of the “inscape” of British identity also provides a useful conceptual term for illuminating women's participation in a national discourse of landscape and class, but from the interior perspective and experience of the middle-class domestic sphere.<sup>22</sup> As a theoretical term, “inscaping” can contribute to our



understanding of women's mediated relationship to landscape politics in which women perform colonizations of England itself through the cultivation of a gardenesque aesthetic.

In general, feminist readings of Victorian culture and space, from Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's literary analyses of women's domestic confinements, to Gillian Rose's elaboration of geography's patriarchal underpinnings in British culture, have shown how masculine forms of landscape and land management have produced the corollary of feminine enclosure, whether symbolic, social, physical, or architectural.<sup>23</sup> But, as many of these same critics have observed, enclosure does not sufficiently account for women's range of spatial movements and practices in nineteenth-century British culture, their specific architectonics of social space or their collusion with patterns of socio-spatial domination. As a complement or alternative to the exterior process of landscaping, Victorian culture also consists of inscaping, a feminized type of ideological work that situates the local, or small, enclosed space associated with women and feminine values of sympathy and self-discipline as the site for social and self-transformation. The social role of the Victorian garden is integral to the cultural work of inscaping, for the nineteenth-century middle classes believed in the moral and physical benefits of green spaces nearly as strongly as they believed in the home as the central place for individual development and instruction.

While the more enduringly popular writer of the early nineteenth century, Jane Austen, uses landscapes as settings that reflect individual households and their values, Elizabeth Hamilton uses landscape as a practical, social tool for the upwardly mobile female protagonist. Chapter 2 concentrates on Hamilton's lesser known novel, *The*

*Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808), a text that represents a seminal shift from an eighteenth-century masculine construct of landscape to a feminine construct of inscaping as a mode of class regulation. Hamilton's *Cottagers* is an early nineteenth-century novel that exemplifies middle-class women's active engagement with landscape aesthetics and anticipates much of Nancy Armstrong and Mary Poovey's analyses of the role of Victorian women by the 1840's. Unlike the protagonists of Austen's novels who never question the legitimacy of the estate system that masks its labor force, Hamilton's protagonist's appreciation of rural landscape is defined in terms of feminine sympathy as well as the more utilitarian principles of managing spaces and people for the social good, enabling her to claim a tutelary relationship to "the poor."

Her pleasure in a moralized vision of the landscape enables the protagonist to travel with a purpose—to observe local conditions, particularly domestic ones, and to intervene sympathetically with the environment and the people who inhabit it, a mobility that defines her status as a respectable bourgeois woman. Rather than functioning as the elite discourse of leisured men, the aesthetics of the country and the rural are given a decidedly practical, reformist bent by the middle-class heroine. While the Austen heroine, for the most part, eventually inhabits the country house and effectively restores upper-class authority and hegemony, Hamilton's humble protagonist anticipates the Victorian heroine of Dickens and Gaskell, whose practical domestic expertise, self-discipline, and cultivation of interclass sympathy pacifies social unrest in the midst of urban growth and dislocation.

As Chapter 2 underscores, the middle-class women writer and her protagonists use landscape aesthetics as a mode of social reform that emphasizes middle-class standards of

domesticity. Chapter 3 examines how the bourgeois garden becomes crucial to the complex architecture of middle-class home life and identity by the mid century in the writings of Jane and John Loudon, influential figures in horticulture and landscape from the 1840's onward. The garden, in effect, extended the stage for which middle-class ideals of privacy, individualism, self-discipline, and improvement of the self and others could be developed and displayed. The explosion of interest in the polite sciences of botany and horticulture, for example, was part of a larger more general extension of the feminine sphere of home to the outdoors, in which women increasingly claimed outdoors spaces and the pleasures of landscape for the good of the domestic sphere. With her husband, the renowned landscaper John Loudon, Jane promoted images of a verdant, productive home life that her husband deemed "gardenesque," an aesthetic that appealed to a predominantly middle-class readership invested in cultivating a productive domestic sphere that signified social citizenship and class mobility.

My study of the Loudons' garden literature therefore emphasizes a crucial shift in landscape ideology. While the eighteenth century celebrated landscape as a primarily masculine, aristocratic domain and discourse, the nineteenth century heralded the smaller, yet no less powerful gardens of the middle classes where cultural values could be developed and displayed. For example, as the first woman writer to urge English "ladies" to dig in the garden, Jane Loudon provided in clear, practical terms the means for claiming the home's exterior as a productive feminine space. This appropriation of the garden also heralded an expression of taste specific to the educated and genteel English woman, whose intimacy with Nature in the form of horticulture and botany reflected a larger sympathy for human relationships as well as social inequalities and suffering. In

addition to her books on horticulture and botany for a female audience, Jane Loudon provided a developed argument for women's superior skills in beautifying the home and garden in her periodical contributions of the late 40's and early '50's. In these same periodicals she often confidently applied her taste for a gardenesque home to her observations of the London poor's domestic practices.

In Chapter 4, my focus shifts from women's practical garden literature to fictional representations of practical women gardeners and inscapers in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* (1866) in order to show how a feminine gardenesque tradition proves crucial to the politics of the Victorian domestic novel. A friend of the Loudons who was undoubtedly familiar with Jane Loudon's gardening philosophy, Gaskell employs a gardenesque critique of an older, rural estate economy, as well as a new generation of aristocratic women who lack the down-to-earth domestic skills of her wholesome protagonist, Molly Gibson. Molly, the novel suggests, is better at managing class relations because of her ability to join households through the cultivation of her garden and her practical homely interest in native English plants and flowers.

On a more somber note, Chapter 5 focuses on George Eliot's retrospective novel, *Middlemarch* (1871). Eliot turns to the English provincial landscape to show how women like Dorothea Brooke who are armed with a gardenesque sensibility sensitive to the living conditions and domestic suffering of the agrarian working class are barred from the landscape and its rational improvement by the entrenched restrictions of a patriarchal tradition of land and inheritance. While Eliot shares a critique of the picturesque, she is more cynical than Gaskell about women's active role in the landscape because of what she perceived as a chaotic political system and her more pervasive fear of working-class

dissent and violence. Scholars from Raymond Williams to Catherine Gallagher have categorized both Gaskell and Eliot's texts as provincial novels that retreat from the social problems confronted by the industrial novel; however, I argue that women's distinct relationship to rural landscape and the garden as sites for cultivating and inculcating domestic values for social reform and the good of the British nation has been overlooked in these readings.<sup>24</sup>

At the end of the century, Octavia Hill's use of landscape in her social work shows how this gardenesque tradition of landscape ultimately shapes London's urban housing policy and late-Victorian middle-class attitudes towards the poor and working classes. Octavia Hill (1838-1912), the tireless housing reformer and advocate for the Open Spaces movement, employs gardenesque principles of beauty and order to bring the country to the city for London's poorest members' physical and moral improvement. For Hill, raised in a family and cultural milieu that encouraged middle-class women's identification with a moralized rural landscape, the outdoors and commons become spaces subject to the feminizing influence of the domestic sphere. Believing the smallest of green spaces could serve as "outdoor sitting-rooms" and "outdoor play-rooms," Hill sought to relocate the civilizing benefits of the bourgeois home to the cityscape itself by domesticating "open" spaces to quell urban unrest and to strengthen the domestic sphere. Critics like H.L. Malchow and S. Martin Gaskell have argued that her conservation and housing work reflected a nostalgic transplanting of the pastoral, and that reformers like her were motivated primarily by anti-urban sentiment.<sup>25</sup> Instead, I argue that her published essays and personal letters resist the traditional dichotomy of country and city. She does this by

underscoring the rational pleasures of gardens and gardening for urban regeneration, spaces and activities for which middle-class women claimed particular expertise.

Finally, the dissertation traces middle-class women's stewardship of a moralized landscape aesthetic that sought to domesticate an increasingly urbanized nation that was still profoundly immersed in the social patterns, iconography, and economies of agrarian, rural life. In contrast with a more masculine, aristocratic tradition of large private pleasure grounds that often housed imperial collections of rare plants and displayed the latest in horticultural experiments, middle-class women embrace a more local, vernacular landscape aesthetic that authorizes their participation in social reform and philanthropy. In both practical household manuals and novels, women use their intimacy with the domestic sphere and its duties to frame English landscapes as sites for building class identity and instituting social reform. Through narratives that construct a particular kind of middle-class feminine subjectivity, nineteenth-century women writers maintain that women are uniquely skilled to extend landscaping practices to the working classes, that their frugality, their ability to read as well as nurture individual character, and their self-discipline authorize their regulation of time, spaces, and resources, qualities derived from but no longer defined by the sweeping landscapes and "pretty prospects" of the eighteenth century.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977; Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986; Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993; Susan Morgan, *Place Matters: Gendered Geography in Victorian Women's Travel Books about Southeast Asia*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996; Elizabeth Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics*,

1716-1818, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Elizabeth Helsinger, *Rural Scenes and National Representation: Britain, 1815-50*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987; Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987; Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-64*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Pamela Gilbert, "Producing the Public: Public Medicine in Private Spaces," *Medicine, Health, and the Public Sphere in Britain, 1600-2000*, ed. Steve Sturdy. Routledge, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Bermingham, 1.

<sup>7</sup> John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620-1820*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988.

<sup>8</sup> Hunt and Willis, 21.

<sup>9</sup> Bermingham, 68-69.

<sup>10</sup> Beth Tobin, *Superintending the Poor: Charitable Ladies and Paternal Landlords in British Fiction, 1770-1860*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> Kim Michasiw, "Nine Revisionist Theses on the Picturesque," *Representations* 38 (1992): 78-90; and Stephen Daniels and Charles Watkins, "Picturesque Landscaping and Estate Management: Uvedale Price and Nathaniel Kent at Foxley," in *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape, and Aesthetics since 1770*, eds. Stephen Copley and Peter Garside, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 13-41.

<sup>12</sup> Michasiw, 79.

<sup>13</sup> Bohls, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Daniels and Watkins, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Bohls, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Jacqueline Labbe, *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism*, London: MacMillan Press, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Labbe, 67.

<sup>18</sup> Labbe, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie: A Tale of the Farmer's Inglenook*, ed. Gina Lurie. London: Garland Publishing, 1974.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, ed. Pam Morris. London: Penguin Books, 1996.

<sup>21</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Bert G. Hornback. Norton Critical Edition, 1977.

<sup>22</sup> Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha. London: Routledge, 1990.

<sup>23</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*. Yale University Press, 1979; and Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: the Limits of Geographical Knowledge*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

<sup>24</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, 168. Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, 265.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Gaskell, "Gardens for the Working Class: Victorian Practical Pleasure," *Victorian Studies*, 23: 4 (1980): 479-501. In his study of late nineteenth-century public gardens and social action, H. L. Malchow characterizes the Kyrle Society's mission as "diffusely philanthropic" and ineffective, due in part to its focus on "individual good works" (109). While undoubtedly driven by bourgeois values, this reading of the society marginalizes the participants themselves who he refers to as "middle-class women with time on their hands," overlooks the deep-seated nature and influence of the gardenesque in the fashioning of middle-class women's subjectivity, and obscures their contributions to philanthropic efforts, class relations, and the changing perceptions of urban and domestic life. See "Public Gardens and Social Action in Late Victorian London," *Victorian Studies*, 29: 1 (1985): 97-109.



## CHAPTER 2

### ELIZABETH HAMILTON'S DOMESTIC REVOLUTIONS AND THE REVISIONING OF LANDSCAPE

The project begins with Elizabeth Hamilton (1758-1816), the neglected Scottish writer and educational theorist, because she is one of the first female nineteenth-century novelists to employ landscape as a medium for the construction of middle-class subjectivity, for the rejuvenation of the domestic sphere, and for the claiming of a tutelary relationship to the poor. Her novels, correspondence, and essays are invested in a moralized landscape aesthetic, one that influences her own upbringing in rural Scotland, her educational theories and fiction, and her philanthropy. Though forgotten for most of the twentieth century, she was widely read by the middle classes in the early nineteenth century and praised by contemporary writers and critics like Maria Edgeworth. According to Edgeworth, Hamilton transformed the “dangerous labyrinth” of metaphysics for women into “a clear, strait, practicable road—a road not only practicable but pleasant, and . . . what is of far more consequence to women, safe” and “practically useful.”<sup>1</sup>

Recent critics have recognized Hamilton for her feminine appropriation of Enlightenment epistemologies in her educational tracts for women like *Letters on Education* (1801) and her participation in British colonial discourse in her fictional travel narrative *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796). However, they have not addressed Hamilton's use of landscape aesthetics to extend women's social influence and their participation in a middle-class cultural revolution in the early nineteenth century. The

dissertation as a whole will focus on how local landscape and domestic gardens become crucial sites in women's writings, extending the domestic sphere for a variety of ideological uses from self-cultivation, to the creation of an imaginative community of female readers and writers, to the "landscaping" of others believed to be in need of reform. In a variety of genres over the nineteenth century, women employ the garden and landscape to define their subjectivity as thoughtful, sympathetic, and rational individuals able to extend a feminized domestic sphere in the interests of class reconciliation and national identity.

Hamilton's work is an early example of women writers' use of the domestic sphere to reshape the public for the purpose of social reform and political commentary in British culture, a position indicative of the cultural shifts that Nancy Armstrong and Mary Poovey have already identified but have attributed to the mid-Victorian period. Now a foundational study for Victorianists, Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* identifies the nineteenth-century novel's formation of a new female ideal, in which women gain cultural power, paradoxically, through the articulation of a private sphere in which feminine experience is centralized.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Mary Poovey's *The Making of the Social Body* has illuminated how a feminized discourse of the private sphere was extended to the public sphere through the "social," a space where feminine ideals of sympathy and personal relations could be used to address larger social problems like sanitation and disease, poverty, and urban overcrowding.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, Hamilton's popularity in the first twenty years of the nineteenth century indicates that middle-class women's use of the domestic sphere and its discourse for engagement in the social was already securely in place, and, I will argue, their

revisioning of women's relationship to landscape was key to this development. Claiming a more practical relationship to both the domestic sphere and landscape, middle-class women writers emphasize the need for a sympathetic feminine eye that moves with practical urgency from interior space to exterior landscape and back again in order to create a more healthy, productive domestic sphere. Female characters with a mature attachment to the countryside and rural landscape, her heroines are portrayed as naturalists who can observe and analyze human behavior within the household more accurately than men of their class, a skill that legitimizes women's tutelary relationship to the working classes and the poor.

Hamilton's dual or complementary representation of women as rational, yet sympathetic observers of social relations both indoors and out is ultimately used not just to legitimate women's larger social role but also to critique a failed paternalism. In her texts, the inhabitants of landscape often suffer from aristocratic neglect or the contaminating influence of the landed class' lack of economy and self-restraint, a portrayal that is repeatedly associated with an eighteenth-century masculine tradition of landscape that emphasizes aesthetic effect over human concerns. As Beth Tobin's study of treatises and pamphlets devoted to the efficacy of the poor laws in the early nineteenth century demonstrate, works like Bentham's "Pauper Management Improved" (1798) and Patrick Colquhoun's "A Treatise on Indigence" (1806) were direct responses to the failures and inefficiency of the poor laws, as well as implicit arguments for middle-class authority and expertise.<sup>4</sup> While Beth Tobin has included Hamilton in an early nineteenth-century critique of the Poor Law system, however, she addresses neither Hamilton's revisioning of landscape discourse nor its use of middle-class domestic ideology.

Therefore, Hamilton's employment of landscape in her promotion of a healthy domestic sphere provides an additional avenue for understanding the rise of the middle classes in the early nineteenth century and their critique of aristocratic land practices and aesthetics. Crucial to this consolidation of the middle classes in the nineteenth century and their promotion of a healthy and productive domestic sphere was their appropriation of landscape, a cultural medium and discourse associated with landed ownership and the aristocracy in the eighteenth century. As the scholarship of Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall has illuminated, middle-class ascendancy and expertise lay, of course, not just in the management of trade, business, and increasingly specialized professions, but in the management of home life and the production of a model domesticity.<sup>5</sup> However, these foundational studies do not address women's use of the garden and landscape to extend the limits of the home as a domain for the expression and consolidation of middle-class values of privacy, individualism, and productive forms of leisure.

Feminist scholars like Elizabeth Bohls and Jacqueline Labbe have recognized women's participation in landscape discourse in early nineteenth-century literature and their critique of a Romantic tradition of the picturesque and sublime. In *Romantic Visualities*, Labbe's purpose is to demystify the prospect view, an "elite viewpoint," that she argues, "leads to a valorization of the general landscape," that signifies male writers' "heightened awareness and enlarged vision."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Bohls has argued that women occupy a vexed relationship to British landscape, a tradition dominated by a male educated elite that reinforces ideals of masculine proprietorship and ideals of gentlemanliness.<sup>7</sup> Drawing upon Naomi Schor's observation that women are often

confined to "the detail" in landscape, these scholars tend to focus on women's exclusion from the ideological power of landscape.<sup>8</sup>

Yet Labbe's revisioning of the tropes of Romantic poetry postulates that the feminized domains of the bower and garden "represent gendered cases of seclusion," suggesting women's potential agency in landscape discourse.<sup>9</sup> Her acknowledgment that the confinement of the garden paradoxically makes it a "open avenue" for women not available to men can be further explained and contextualized by considering women's cultivation of the garden both in their own lives and their fictions as part of a much larger cultural transformation: the consolidation of the middle classes and the extension of a feminized domestic sphere over the course of the long nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> There has been little study of women's participation in this development, or how this process enabled the production of a social vision rooted in a distinctively middle-class ideology of domesticity practiced and represented by a 'special' class of women. Nor has the existing scholarship addressed the specific contexts of the garden and social reform in women's inscaping of British culture.

Elizabeth Hamilton's vocation as writer and reformer is deeply indebted to a British landscape tradition, one that women actively involved in revising and reinventing. However, her letters published in conjunction with her contemporary female biographer, Elizabeth Benger, record and construct the development of a formidable woman writer who was a nuanced reader of landscape, who deftly employed in her novels a moralized landscape aesthetic garnered in part from her travels through the regional landscapes of the Highlands, Wales, and the English Lake District. While her first publication, (ostensibly submitted without her knowledge by her aunt, was an account of her tour of

the Highlands, her subsequent fiction would incorporate detailed descriptions of cottagers' households and their distinctive habits as a means to define a Scottish national character and to promote middle-class women's role as educational and sanitary reformers of the poor and working classes. While her protagonists express their appreciation for the British countryside, these discussions are used as a device to enter into the landscape, focusing in particular on the domestic sphere as the center of national regeneration and social control.

The first section of this chapter is devoted to Elizabeth Benger's 1819 biography of Hamilton because she participates in the continuation and promotion of landscape as a site for the cultivation of women writers and social thinkers. Benger's account frames Hamilton's development as a writer in terms of a female tradition in which mothers and maternal aunts advocate the countryside as an outdoor classroom for developing the female child's moral character. Following Hamilton's focus on women's intellectual and spiritual strengths, Benger also highlights the importance of women's cultivation of rational, independent thinking. Thus, both Benger and Hamilton's readings of landscape are used to legitimize women's managerial role in the domestic sphere as well as their broader social relevance.

Another stage in the development of the woman educator and moralist that this chapter will trace is the cultivation of both practical and rational uses of the garden for the promotion of the social good. Hamilton's landscape ethic contrasts the smaller, domestic garden as a site for the display of the middle-class values of self-restraint, industry, and individualism with the excesses associated with aristocratic landscaping. In contrast with the velvet lawns and elaborate, cultivated gardens that often required the

removal of local laborers and their cottages from the park gates, the smaller garden becomes a means for fostering closer ties between the middle classes and the working classes because it was a space that individual women could claim, at least imaginatively, as an extension of their own domain of expertise, the domestic sphere. After 1800, British writers and philosophers dissillusioned by the French Revolution and a growing middle-class population anxious about growing class tensions, looked to literature like Hamilton's which promised class reconciliation through a more practical, feminization of landscape. The domestic garden, Hamilton suggests in her fiction, could inculcate the increasingly essential elements of middle-class identity like privacy, self-discipline, and domestic order while restoring the best principles of the English manorial system: social harmony and agricultural productivity.<sup>11</sup>

This chapter's final section will focus on Hamilton's fusing of landscape aesthetics and domestic ideology in her didactic novel of village reform, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie: a Tale for the Farmer's Ingle-nook* (1808).<sup>12</sup> Women's role as active observers of human behavior will take on a particular urgency in the first half of *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*. Female characters function as detectives of the household, restoring fairness, revealing character, and meting out punishments and rewards to achieve social harmony within the microcosm of the domestic sphere. In the latter half of the novel, the protagonist who has risen from a household servant to respected English governess brings her domestic expertise to bear on her native Scottish village of Glenburnie, where she applies principles of landscape husbandry to effect social reform that exceeds the individual household, reshaping the rural landscape from the inside out, one cottage at a time.

Elizabeth Benger's Biography of Hamilton, Landscape, and the Fashioning of Female Subjectivity

Elizabeth Benger's 1819 biography of Hamilton is indicative of women's feminization of landscape through the benefits and perceived constraints of the domestic sphere. As Hamilton's contemporary and friend, Benger highlights the educational theorist and novelist's rural upbringing, her fulfillment of her domestic duty, and her commitment to other women writers. Yet the letters themselves, while reflecting a shared belief in feminine domestic principles and a belief in the moral health of the countryside, also reveal Hamilton's struggle with rural isolation, the loneliness of caring for ailing relatives for many years, and her desire for an extended intellectual life frustrated by inadequate educational standards and institutions for women. In addition, I will argue, these letters highlight how Hamilton's perception of land and its social relations are filtered through the practical demands of the domestic sphere, an emphasis that mitigates what she perceived as the excesses of individualism that she attacks in both *Modern Philosophers* and *The Cottagers*.

Using Elizabeth Hamilton as her example, Benger asserts that women's early education should include the moral and intellectual benefits of the countryside. Born in Glasgow of an Irish mother and Scottish father, Hamilton was sent to live in the countryside with her paternal aunt and uncle, the Marshalls, after her father's death when she was nine. While her uncle was, according to family letters, "the son of a peasant," he had risen to the status of a successful gentleman farmer, well-educated and dedicated to his parish.<sup>13</sup> Despite Hamilton's early removal from her mother, brother, and sister and the financial troubles that required her to take on new "parental protectors," Benger emphasizes Hamilton's early enjoyment of "the privileges annexed to a rural residence,"



where she enjoyed "fording the burns in summer or sliding over their frozen surface in winter" (32-33). Benger includes a letter from Hamilton to verify this idyllic upbringing: "No child ever spent so happy a life; nor indeed, have I ever met with any thing at all resembling the way in which we lived, except the description of Wolmar's farm and vintage" (42). Nor are the benefits of rural seclusion abandoned when Mr. Marshall and his family moved to Ingram's Crook in 1772. There Hamilton would remain until 1788, according to Benger "a romantic spot, ennobled by its vicinity to the celebrated stream of Bannockburn" (42).<sup>14</sup>

In her cheerful description of Elizabeth's childhood, Benger is careful to legitimate Mrs. Marshall's maternal *laissez faire* rule in allowing her niece to revel in "rural dissipation," by citing Dugald Stewart, an influential educationist of the period, who, following Rousseau, advocated a carefree, unregimented enjoyment of the outdoors for children:

"When nature is allowed free scope," says Dugald Stewart, "the curiosity, during early youth is alive to every external object, and to every external occurrence. Whenever a child contracts a disrelish for those amusements... the best of all education is lost, which nature has prepared amidst the active sports and hazardous adventures of childhood. It is from these alone that we can acquire, not only, that force of character which is suited to the more arduous situations of life, but that complete and prompt command of attention to things external." (33-34)

Of course, Stewart's polemic is explicitly male-centered; he writes of the male child for whom it is crucial to develop an attitude and energy towards "things external." Yet Benger uses Stewart's ideas about education because it appeals to a feminine emphasis on "personal experience" and critiques what may be perceived as a masculine tendency to retreat into "solitary speculations." In addition, the biographer's use of an affectionate vernacular of Scottish landscape that centralizes "nature," the privileged metaphysical

ground for individual development, suggests that these playing fields are the rightful province of the female as well as the male child.

While Benger celebrates the rural countryside in the childhood development, she is also careful to emphasize Hamilton's later commitment to domestic harmony, her supportive, feminine management of the household. After the death of Mrs. Marshall in 1880, for example, Benger insists that Hamilton achieved "the beau ideal of domestic economy" (75). In contrast with Benger's more straight-forwardly Romantic celebration of the Hamilton's energetic girlhood fostered by Nature, however, Hamilton's letters reveal a decidedly anti-picturesque bent, an attitude that also shapes her later more developed middle-class vision of social reform and domestic ideology. To further emphasize Hamilton's domestic commitments to her new model family, close-knit, harmonious, and socially responsible, Benger includes Hamilton's letters to her older brother Charles, an officer stationed in India who acted as her primary mentor and confidant until his death in 1788. While showing her sisterly devotion, however, Hamilton's letters also betray the isolation of her adolescence and young womanhood. For example, a 1781 letter to Charles reveals a devoted sister trying to reconcile herself to a peaceful, yet lonely life in the country: "The summer has passed with me in an agreeable manner: it is always a season of enjoyment as the pleasures it affords are particularly calculated for my rural taste, and, in my present situation, these are almost the only ones I can partake of . . ." (84-85).

Later, "rural virtue" will signify status for her protagonist, Mrs. Mason, but here her own commitment to the country is bittersweet. In the same letter, Hamilton responds hopefully to the prospect of Charles's return to England, a possibility that dominates her

"leisure hours": "But, indeed, in them I may include the whole twenty-four: for here tranquility holds an uninterrupted reign" (85). The letter's conclusion also betrays the accumulated tedium of rural and domestic isolation:

In some cross moments, I can't help thinking it a little hard, that with all the good will imaginable towards the pleasures of society, I should be condemned to pass the best days of my life in solitude, that I might, to all intents and purposes, be as well shut up in a monastery; for, though I am not forbid the use of my tongue, unless I were to utter my complaints to the groves and purling streams, I must be silent; and I am not far enough gone either in love or romance, to talk to woods and wilds. But pardon me so much egotism, which I don't know how I was led into. (88)

As she chaffs against the monotony of domestic, rural solitude, she is decidedly anti-pastoral and anti-romantic in her treatment of landscape, a critical view of the country that will be developed and refined in her later literary work. In contrast with Wordsworth's later *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Hamilton associates a conversation between herself and "woods and wilds" with egotism. Thus, the "purling streams" give her no solace—and she seems to mock the leisure of poetic contemplation ostensibly enjoyed by the male Romantic poet. While she does not explicitly invoke her gender as the cause of her aesthetic isolation, she suggests that "to utter [her] complaints" would be a self-indulgent poetic position for a woman. Nevertheless, this self-consciousness helps her to define a distinctly feminine orientation to landscape. Her experience of a confining domestic sphere cause her to question the pleasures of landscape conventionally enjoyed and celebrated by the travelling male poet. This questioning of Romantic tropes that celebrate solitary communions with Nature will later strengthen her more practical vision of landscape as a mode of social reform.

Ultimately, Bengler chronicles how Elizabeth Hamilton's identity as an educationalist and novelist was shaped by her rural childhood and this rural upbringing illuminates how her theory of feminine domestic expertise contributes to her articulation

of a moralized aesthetic of the garden and the countryside. Finally, Benger's biography and Hamilton's letters and the novels themselves Hamilton's own vexed position as a gregarious, intellectually vigorous woman compelled to live until her early thirties as a female dependent and companion to her aging aunt and uncle frames her more practical, realistic relationship to landscape, one that questions the limits of the picturesque and sublime for women who must fulfill their domestic duties and attend to the practical needs of home and family.

After the death of Mr. Marshall in 1888, Hamilton's relationship to the national landscape shifts dramatically. As Benger's inclusion of Hamilton's letters to female friends highlight in the following years, Hamilton becomes an experienced traveller and more confident reader of landscape. Part of this confidence stemmed from her cultivation of friendships with other women, which fostered her appreciation for what she observed to be women's superior skills of observation in domestic contexts. It is therefore crucial to realize how Hamilton's own newfound mobility, her relocation to the city, shape her aesthetics. Significantly, the letters she writes after moving to Edinburgh mark a revolution in her relationship to rural landscape: once she is removed from the countryside, these trips are experienced as happy "retreats," or social events rather than as periods of monotonous seclusion (140).

"All girls build castles . . . I have raised structures of all dimensions"<sup>15</sup>: Elizabeth Hamilton, Female Imagination, and the National Landscape

In her correspondence with other women, Elizabeth Hamilton transforms her frustrated desire for physical mobility and a wider social life into a valuable resource. Claiming sensitivity and intelligence as interior qualities specific to women because of their domestic placement, she attributes to them a spatial knowledge that is contingent

upon their superior knowledge of the household. In 1808, the same year that she published *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, Hamilton wrote in her private journal:

I am well convinced that they must ever be content with a very narrow and superficial knowledge of human character, who do not study it at the seasons when it is to be seen in undress; or rather in the nakedness in which it appears in the domestic scene. The men who boast a knowledge of the world know mankind only as they appear in one or two particular habits, and these assumed ones. They, therefore, do not seem to be aware of that infinite variety which in reality exists; nor do they enter into the minute circumstances by which that variety is formed. Women have more frequent opportunities for doing so than men have; but women seldom generalize: their attention is solely occupied with little particulars, from which they draw no general inferences; but where they are more capable, they have much in their power, as I am persuaded that single week spent *tete-a-tete* with a person, in their own house, gives a more thorough insight into the mind and disposition than would in years be obtained in the common intercourse of society. (Benger 250-51)

While Hamilton initially claims a polarity between the "little particulars" of the home as experience that often precludes the ability to "generalize," the latter half of the passage suggests that there are exceptional women who are able to more accurately read human behavior and character because of their domestic placement. As Janice Thaddeus points out in her analysis of Hamilton's *Memoirs of Agrippina*, the novelist centralizes the domestic space as the site for knowledge where "women learn 'in their domestic avocations' how to generalize, how to think about 'questions of importance.'"<sup>16</sup> While the Romantic tradition posits 'Nature,' as the ontological basis for knowledge and human behavior, Hamilton revises this convention by making the household the authentic ground for self-exploration and analysis of human character. Indeed, the emphasis on "nakedness" and "infinite variety" echo the British middle-class culture's investment in scientific progress and "improvement;" here, women are portrayed as naturalists who can observe and analyze human nature more accurately within (and because of) the intimacy of the home.

While Hamilton acknowledges the cultural norm relegating women to the knowledge of particular details rather than abstract thinking and broader views, she also displaces it with her unique attention to spatial and architectural structures as metaphors for women's imaginative lives. For example, in an 1801 letter to an unidentified female friend, she writes passionately about the association between medieval architecture and women's imaginations

I perfectly agree with you in considering castles more useful edifices than they are usually allowed to be . . . I do not scruple to confess to you, as I find you are a sister of free-masonry, that I owe to it three-fourths of my sense, and half of my virtue... It is by comparing the ardent efforts of exalted virtue, formed by the fancy, with what conscience tells us we have performed, that we are instigated to improvement; and by tracing the combinations of which our castles have been composed, we acquire a knowledge of our own minds... Was ever Bath belle as much improved by walking on the crowded Crescent as you and I have been by a solitary ramble, when at the magic touch of fancy, a new creation has arisen around us? (Benger 140-141)

For women able to move freely and define a privacy that affords a sense of autonomy, the qualities of creativity and usefulness are fused and interdependent. Her emphasis on freemasonry as a basis for sisterhood is a provocative inversion of a masculine tradition, an emphasis that posits the immaterial and abstract female imagination as the source of real agency and identity, though it must be carefully guarded and shared with a select few. She suggests the precious nature of these meetings, claiming the rural as the place for a "solitary ramble" while avoiding the more popular, public architecture of the Crescent for their own more private "castle building." Her experience of isolation in the Scottish countryside as a young woman, and her realistic anti-pastoral stance, is mediated by her newfound leisure to enjoy a rural retreat with a sympathetic female companion.

Hamilton's tours, rather than delighting in the solitary enjoyment of picturesque scenery, emphasize the opportunity to meet and travel with female friends. On a visit to

Llangollen in 1802-03, she emphasizes the "the charming society, which formed the animated part of the picture, was still more interesting than any other object," and describes her "enthusiastic delight" at joining with friends at their cottage, "the quintessence of taste, elegance, and comfort" (Benger 158). In the Lake District, Hamilton emphasizes lodging and accommodations over the outdoor sights, preferring the comforts of gathering with friends rather more than the pleasures of landscape: "Our mountains are grand, our lakes are beautiful; but neither lakes nor mountains can supply the place of a thousand comforts and conveniences which habit converts into necessity . . ." (Benger 155).

As the next section of the same letter suggests, these tours gave her ample opportunity to observe the domestic habits of local people who lodged tourists like herself but could not meet her middle-class domestic tastes. Forced to stay inside by the rain for nearly a month, she complains of being "confined to a little, stifled, smoky hole, incommoded by the noise of the family, plagued with ignorant domestics, without books, or the means of procuring them" (Benger 156). We can surmise that these trips afforded her opportunities to observe the domestic habits of local people for her *Modern Philosophers* hero, Henry Sydney, relates a surprisingly detailed description of his travels that emphasizes everyday life and practices of rural inhabitants from position of middle-class privilege and domestic interests. While there are no other letters about her observations of local cottage life, her detailed descriptions of the fictional MacClarty's domestic life suggest she took an active, critical interest in the people who lived in the landscapes she visited.

Paradoxically, this sense of entitlement, the ability to claim "private" spaces usually conferred on men in the dominant ideology of landscape, enables Hamilton to channel her domestic duty by emphasizing its social centrality, rather than its peripheral, private nature. With her own legitimated mobility as an author who espouses doctrines of self-discipline and order, Hamilton's experience of domestic confinement and rural seclusion are spatially reconfigured in her own practices of self-regulation and reflected in her approach to domestic interior spaces like that of her home with the Marshalls at Ingram's Crook, in which "management" becomes the key term for feminine expertise and success. As Elizabeth Bengler explains,

. . . and for the first six years after Mrs. Marshall's death, she scarcely absented herself from Ingram's Crook unaccompanied by her uncle. In her own department she established the most perfect order and regularity; and the evidence of two contemporary friends warrants the assertion, that Ingram's Crook, under the superintendence of Mrs. Hamilton, realized the beau ideal of domestic economy. (75)

While Bengler's account is intended to emphasize the successful writer's domestic virtues, Hamilton celebrates the virtues of woman's domestic management in her fiction and her letters. Though deferring to her uncle's authority, Hamilton emphasizes her management skills when she writes to her brother, "He leaves every thing to my management within doors, and expresses approbation of every thing I do. Indeed I never take a step without his advice" (77).

Hamilton features these same feminine skills of domestic economy and management in the character of Harriet Oswell, the heroine of *Modern Philosophers*. In contrast with Bridgetina and Julia, female characters who blindly accept the tenets of an excessive individualism that leads to social anarchy and ruin, Harriet's knowledge is practical and effective because it is grounded in the household:



It was now past twelve o'clock; already had the active and judicious Harriet performed every domestic task; and having completely regulated the family economy for the day, was quietly seated at work with her aunt and sister, listening to Hume's History of England, as it was read to her by some orphan girl, whom she herself had instructed. (qtd. in Benger, 75)

This tableau is not just a sentimental image of domestic peace; rather, the character description identifies the "active" and "judicious" qualities required to manage self, others, and a complicated middle-class household. Characteristic of this description, which will be more fully developed in *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* and its protagonist, are middle-class domestic concerns with self-regulation, economy, and the efficient use of space, household objects, and servants.

Hamilton stresses these multiple goals in the narrator's direct address to her female readers in *Modern Philosophers*:

Be so good as fairly to set down every day the time employed in repeating directions imperfectly given, or in revoking those that were given improperly; the time wasted in again looking at that which you have looked at before; the time thrown away in peeping into corners without object or end in view; the time misspent in perplexing your domestics with contradictory orders; and the time abused in scolding them. (qtd. in Benger, 76)

The woman as the subject of household authority becomes the centralized mechanism for domestic harmony through her voice, her movements, her eyes, and, finally, her behavior--all defeat and all glory converge on her. As in her letters and novels, domestic order can only be achieved through the proper kind of management, in which the judicious use of voice and eyes--one must speak and look with intent, rather than "repeating directions" or "peeping without object or end in view"--sustains a well-regulated home.

Women's successful household management through self-regulation also extends to the working classes and their improvement. While these modes of home management

earn the domestic heroine respect, the mantra of time emphasizes the ultimate middle-class goal of leisure earned--the time to cultivate and "improve" oneself and others, of course, is dependent on her condescending patronage of "some orphan girl." Through the character of Harriet Oswell, the ordering of interior space affords the leisure to enjoy Hume's *History of England*; thus, Hamilton's *Modern Philosophers* suggests that domestic order, rather than signaling a retreat from the external world, enables participation in the national imagination, a community of readers and nation builders which women are extending within the habitus of home.

Finally, in Harriet Oswell, Hamilton constructs an image of woman whose successful domestic management is reinforced by her healthy attachment to the garden and the humble flora like the cabbage rose. As later chapters will elaborate, the garden becomes an extended stage for women's management of domestic sphere as well as the means for articulating visions of social reform that require the ability to manage people, spaces, and resources kindly, yet efficiently.

#### The Domestic Politics of Village Reform in Hamilton's *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*

*The Cottagers of Glenburnie* is shaped by a decidedly middle-class and feminine perspective that is legitimated in the selective, often contradictory appropriation of the principles of landscape husbandry that also problematizes the class politics of landscape aesthetics--for Hamilton embraces the mobility of picturesque domestic tourism as well as an emphasis on landscape husbandry associated with a select group of improving landlords who are able to marry interests in "improving" the living conditions of tenants and cottagers with an aesthetic that reflects refinement and taste. The narrative's two-part structure provides the framework for the amalgamation of landscape ideals and middle-class goals; the first, related through flashback) is that of the protagonist's own

"improvement" as a domestic servant in an aristocratic household, a masonry of middle-class subjectivity aided by genteel mentors such as Miss Osborne and Miss Malden within a fractious, feminine estate abandoned by or neglected by its patriarchs. The other story is that of an elderly Mrs. Mason, who after years of loyal service to the aristocratic Longlands family, mobilizes her well-earned and carefully cultivated subjectivity in order to reform a neglected Scottish village through the middle-class values of efficiency, order, and disciplined forms of leisure such as gardening.

Elizabeth Hamilton's *Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808)<sup>17</sup> is one of the earliest and most thorough examples of a woman's novel that uses the principles of landscape husbandry and the political economy of the estate to "improve" the working classes. Like many of the eighteenth-century landscape theorists before her and the Victorians who followed her, Hamilton figures the laborer's cottage as the symbolic locus of British national health and improvement. More specifically, Hamilton's most successful publication, the "harmless Tale" that Clover admired for its feminine propriety and practicality, reflects the ideology of improvement embraced by the English middle classes at the turn of the century in relationship to the poor and working classes. In contrast to the more Romantic, Revolutionary-minded writings of the 1790's by such writers as Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, or Mary Hays, however, her novel of domestic reform promotes a sense of national consciousness and unity fostered by middle-class values of self-discipline and individualism. I will argue that women's stewardship of a moralized landscape beginning in the early nineteenth century enables their extension of domestic ideology beyond the boundaries of home to the outdoors and the living spaces of the working classes. Ultimately, Hamilton's landscape aesthetic is

uniquely fused with domestic politics, a connection that she uses to define a middle-class female subjectivity that authorize the heroine's social rise through her employment of "sympathetic" modes of improvement.

The spatial movement of the novel is ultimately indicative of women's inscaping, in which feminine conceptions of landscape and a healthy domestic sphere are disseminated outwards through the female protagonist's moral influence, sympathy, and practical domestic knowledge. Hamilton's dual narrative structure begins with a closed domestic space of the aristocratic household in need of reform and its practical lessons in self-discipline and household management, and in the latter half applies these lessons to laborers' cottages.

The small body of scholarship that has rediscovered Hamilton has tended to focus on her earlier works that more explicitly participate in Revolutionary debates and British colonial rule and influence. Broadview Press, for example, has recently restored to print Hamilton's earlier works like *Memoirs for Modern Philosophers* (1800), a novel that engages a lively political dialogue between Anti-Jacobin and Jacobin figures, and *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796), which has appealed particularly to scholars interested in the role of Orientalism in the development of British identity and colonial discourse.<sup>18</sup> Neither an overtly political satire or a travel narrative, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie: A Tale for the Farmer's Ingle-nook*, has been, with a few significant exceptions, classified as a safer, more "feminine" novel in terms of its conventional narrative --the protagonist is a woman of working-class origin and her mobility is, at least on the surface, limited to a removal from one household to another in the Scottish countryside. In addition, its focus is decidedly local and regional, centered

in rural Scotland where Hamilton had lived for over half of her life. Assuming it to be a transparently ideological work, recent studies of Hamilton's work have tended to overlook *The Cottagers*, accepting it as a woman's quaint depiction of rural Scottish life, like the sentimentalized sketches and miniatures of landscape women of leisure were encouraged to produce. Undoubtedly, the novel has been depoliticized and marginalized, due in part, as Clover's epistle that begins this chapter suggests, to its decisively didactic nature. Its ideological affiliation with conduct books, often *a priori* considered a conservative feminine genre, has made it particularly susceptible to these classifications. Thus, her novel has been alternately portrayed as at once domestic and feminine as well as paternalistic and conservative.

Yet, as Patrick Kelly has pointed out in *Writing, Women, and Revolution 1790-1827*, Hamilton's *Cottagers* was an important contribution to women's writing and indicative of the feminization of the public sphere that women fostered in the realist novel of the nineteenth century. As Hamilton's friend and biographer's account, Elizabeth Benger suggests, the "rural Tale" was not just widely perceived by the middle classes as a tool for reform, but also a means for demonstrating their intellectual interest in the Scottish laborer as an emblem of Scottish identity and character :

To the honour of North Britain, its success was equal to its merits: in Edinburgh, the demand for the work was such as induced the publishers to print a cheap edition, which circulated to the Highlands, where even the Genius of the mountains confessed the influence of good sense and the importance of domestic economy. In England, the *Cottagers* were equally caressed. "I canna be fashed" became a popular phrase; and the name of Mrs. M'Clarty (sic) was a passport to attention in the polished circles of fashion, of elegance, and beauty. (32)

Benger then footnotes this passage with the following anecdote as further evidence of the novel's popularity and success: "In Stirlingshire, Glenburnie was read with such avidity, that Isabel Irvine (the attendant of Mrs. Hamilton's juvenile years), made money by

lending her copy at so much per head" (32). The middle-class reception of the novel as both useful and humorously accurate in its depiction of the Scottish cottagers contributed to Hamilton's reputation as woman of letters qualified to promote national peace and progress.

Patrick Kelly's study of British women writers' and their literary responses to social change during the Revolutionary and Romantic periods of British culture compares Hamilton's work to other influential authors of the period like Helen Maria Williams and Mary Hays, women writers who also used feminine genres to participate in the most pressing political and theological debates of the day.<sup>19</sup> According to Kelly, Hamilton appropriates masculine discourses of philosophy, history, and theology and combines them with feminine discourses of the home and family, a blending that ostensibly distinguishes her writing from the more feminine novel of manners or the gothic narrative Kelly distinguishes between her earlier works, which he sees as markedly Anti-revolutionary, and her later works like *Cottagers*, which he believes, demonstrates her "Revolutionary feminism."<sup>20</sup> In his otherwise comprehensive analysis of Hamilton's work however, nowhere does he identify her stewardship of landscape for her promotion of a feminized social vision of reform. Tending to focus more on her employment of modes of disciplinary discourse that he associates with a nascent professionalized middle class, Kelly's study does not recognize her construction of a feminine subjectivity through landscape discourse to authorize her reform of the working classes.

Janice Thaddeus has more explicitly questioned Hamilton's conservative status by arguing that *The Cottagers*, in particular, is radical to the extent that it posits woman and the home as the site of political reform. Drawing from Hamilton's characterization of

women and the superiority of women's practical knowledge of the household in many of her texts, Thaddeus argues that the novelist's political conservatism must be qualified by her gender politics. Thus, she downplays critics like Nancy Armstrong who have emphasized Hamilton's aristocratic sympathies, thoughtfully pointing out the specific contexts of women writers during this period whose access to political discourse and argumentation was particularly charged and tenuous. Thaddeus claims that the author's "chief interest and subject was women--their position, their education, their means to power," and that her writings were "an unusual amalgam of politics, domesticity, class consciousness, and explicit awareness of women's subjection."<sup>21</sup> Like Kelly and Armstrong, however, Thaddeus leaves unexamined one of the crucial discourses that constituted bourgeois women's means to power, landscape as a feminized discourse, as well as the maternal orientation this discourse takes in their vision of social reform.

For it is ultimately Hamilton's approach to landscape that shapes the politics of the novel, her revolution of the domestic sphere to claim a broader public voice in social reform and promote the consolidation of the middle classes. Though the first half of the novel is almost entirely focused on the interior of the Longlands' estate and its vexed domestic politics, the story begins with of the middle-aged protagonist, Mrs. Mason, leaving her former employers and arriving at the home of a widower, Mr. Stewart, and his two daughters, Belle and Mary. As the name suggests, Mr. Stewart is a man who, though the son of a farmer, has achieved the status of a gentlemen through his education and service as manager and steward of the Longlands' estate. Notably, Mr. Stewart's status as manager of an aristocratic estate reflects the tendentious relationship between traditional estate management and the threatening import of middle-class expertise.

Mrs. Mason's arrival at his home strongly marks her as respectably middle-class. The servant who announces Mrs. Mason identifies her as "a gentlewoman," with a "most pleasant countenance," while the spoiled, pretentious eldest daughter, Belle, immediately wants to know the visitor's mode of travel: "'Did she come in her own carriage, or in a hack?' asked Miss Stewart. 'She came riding on a double horse' replied the lad. 'Riding double!' cried Miss Stewart, resuming her seat, 'I thought she had been a lady'" (2). This opening sequence also establishes Belle's erroneous reliance on material signs of rank like carriages and clothes rather than interior or intrinsic qualities reflected in one's physical "countenance,"--a prejudice associated with a corrupt aristocracy unable to recognize true character and signs of worth.

Checking Belle's cold reception of Mrs. Mason, Mr. Stewart tells his daughters that the visitor deserves their respect because she was a sympathetic friend and caring nurse to his wife, the former Miss Osborne, when she was treated by the Longlands as "a poor relation" (34). Mary, the daughter who favors her dead mother serves as sympathetic listener to Mrs. Mason's embedded history. Mrs. Mason shares with Mary her trials as a domestic servant in order to emphasize the virtues of duty and discipline. Orphaned at a very young age, she is taken in and employed by the wealthy Longlands family after she charms the lady of the house with her honesty and industry. What appears at first to be a simple story of good works and rewards, however, becomes a grueling litany of domestic injustices and intrigues. The fraught politics of the household, the jealousy of the housekeeper, Mrs. Jackson, and the tyranny of a spoiled child heir repeatedly place the young Betty Mason in vulnerable positions that test her honesty and patience.



Yet between these trials, and often as a result of them, she acquires new household skills that form part of a lifetime project of self-improvement. When she is first employed at Hill Castle, she is placed under the management of Mrs. Jackson, the housekeeper, who teaches her needlework. Employed to embroider chair-covers in Lady Longland's dressing room, Mrs. Mason recounts that though the "close confinement was not good for her health, it was good for giving me a habit of application" (35). Soon Mrs. Jackson resents Betty's accomplished needlework and the intimacy with "her ladyship" that it affords, so the housekeeper has the child reassigned to work under the housemaid, ostensibly to allow her more activity. Despite Mrs. Jackson's selfish motives, Betty's change of employment proves beneficial, though the transition is at first difficult because of the sedentary and confined nature of her previous labors in which she was "cramped by constant sitting" (35). Nevertheless, she adjusts quickly under the supervision of Molly, the "active and clever" housemaid:

As there were many polished grates to scour, and a vast number of rooms to clean, we had a great deal to do; but it was made easy by regularity and method; so that in winter we had time to sit down to our needles in the evening and in summer generally contrived to get a walk as far as the dairy. (39)

In this passage, as in Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, there is the middle-class emphasis on method and the "science" of industry, in which labor is qualified as a virtue that affords leisure and enjoyment, and even a limited mobility. Though Betty is a servant, her middle-class sensibility has been established in the novel's introduction in her manners and speech, and this sensibility frames her history in the Longlands' home that she narrates for Mary's moral instruction.

Mrs. Mason's history of domestic labor and moral development in the aristocratic household, though contentious and often brutal, is also characterized by a series of female

friendships and mentoring which enable her to survive and eventually prosper. Mrs. Jackson, initially touched by Betty's good character and warm stockings, becomes her advocate, bringing her to Lady Longlands for employment. When their relationship sours, Molly becomes her teacher and companion, showing her how to do "all sorts of housework" and praising her for her quickness and diligence. Miss Osborne, Mr. Stewart's deceased wife at the point where the narrative begins, is a cousin who is taken in by the family and treated with grudging acceptance. Despite the awkwardness of her position in the family hierarchy, "where her situation at Hill Castle was indeed a thorny one," she begins her own kind of philanthropic work by stewarding Betty's education (51). As Mrs. Mason recalls, "to her goodness I am indeed indebted for all I know. From her I learned not only to read with propriety, to write a tolerable hand, and to cast accounts; but what was more valuable than all these, from her I learned to think" (50). Thus, despite her required obedience and humility as a servant, "to think," the independent critical thought that Miss Osborne cultivates becomes a kind of portable property that will authorize her later project of village reform.

Mrs. Mason's independent reasoning distinguishes her from the other domestic servants, though it must be constantly channeled and controlled in socially acceptable ways--through demonstrations of duty, hard work, and a truthful, charitable nature. Her relationship with Miss Osborne confers the quality of sympathy necessary for her self-improvement in moments of shared, often unspoken emotion. Thus, key to Mrs. Mason's personal narrative is an emphasis on the burgeoning middle-class values of self-discipline and restraint that are worked out in the contexts of feminine sympathy and intimacy. Mary's mother, the former Miss Osborne provides Betty with a sympathetic female

mentor within a hostile domestic environment where the working class servant is most vulnerable. Despite domestic enclosure or, indeed, because of it, women's bonds within the household afford the social networks, skills, sympathy and sensibility necessary for women's social mobility and mediated agency as middle-class subjects.

In a marked departure from the novel's narrative style, one episode demonstrates a very early form of the detective and sensation fiction genres, in which the seeds of criminality are located and contained within the home. The shift in tone dramatizes the varying types of feminine power and agency, legitimate and illegitimate, and ultimately distinguishes through accurate "detection" the false from the true domestic servant. Not surprisingly, it is the English educated Miss Osborne who becomes Betty's defender during this narrative event. The genteel woman becomes the mediating force whose powerful observation and insight unveils the true nature of the domestic disturbance and reestablishes Betty's innocence. Though disliked by Lady Longlands because she is a poor relation, Miss Osborne nevertheless attempts to reunite her with her estranged son. The intrigue begins with the visit of Lady Longlands' estranged son and his child, Lord Lintop, who is known for his bad behavior, which the protagonist attributes to the "bad management" of his incompetent nursemaid, Jenny Thompson (52). When the child heir destroys the lace Betty has painstakingly ironed, Jenny insists that they claim it was an accident, arguing that servants must tell fictions to please their employers and maintain their places. Betty refuses to lie, but when she tells the truth about Lord Lintop's behavior and the fate of the lace, the Lady exclaims, "I am happy to have detected you"--believing Jenny's story instead (59).

The novel ultimately distinguishes between false and authentic forms of detection. While the vain, easily flattered aristocratic woman shows an unseemly lack of self-control and self-satisfaction in her exclamation, Miss Osborne quietly, yet authoritatively questions Jenny about the details of her "story," which reveals the latter's inconsistency and multiple attempts to secure her own place in the household through flattery and evasion. The lace incident's emphasis on detection and surveillance is extended with Miss Osborne's intervention, when she attempts to argue on Betty's behalf, drawing on her own careful observation of the young servant's moral character. While her detective work is initially unsuccessful--that is, it fails to convince the vain Lady Longlands who is misled by the flattery of her insincere servants--Miss Osborne is able to speak convincingly as mediator of domestic affairs to the visiting Lord on Betty's behalf. With "the matter investigated fairly," Lord Longlands "detects" Jenny's lie and awards Betty with a gold coin to "memorial[ize]" her honesty (65). Informed by feminine modes of knowledge gathering, Lord Longlands, the paternal authority overcomes the child's deceitful nature. (Of course, Longland's general absence undermines his power and his ability to confer with knowledgeable women in the household). Nevertheless, this narrative event distinguishes between false and true forms of detection/surveillance, privileging Miss Osborne's accurate, moral readings of character over Lady Longlands' narcissistic and falsifying "detection," which renders the household an unstable, fractious domestic space.

Hamilton's novel privileges women who are able to accurately observe and successfully manage the household and its social relations and networks of female mentors who encourage education, work, and self-restraint. These women are often dependents of absent fathers, irresponsible landlords, or corrupt employers, whose

friendships and shared skills within confined spaces are ultimately rewarded with social and physical mobility. In *The Cottagers*, the mentor relationship between Mrs. Mason and Mary is mirrored by Mrs. Osborne's prior tutelage of the young Miss Mason, as well as the advocacy of higher level servants such as Molly, and, finally, Miss Malden, an "old aunt" who is granted responsibility for the regulated household of Lord Longlands and his new mistress, where Mrs. Mason rises to the more respectable domestic status of governess.

Thus, while the second half of the novel maintains clearer distinctions between classes of women, Mrs. Mason's network of mentors undermines these distinctions. For Hamilton, what unites women of "character" is a shared sense of vulnerability highlighted by domestic constraints, but their confinement braces and fortifies their characters, thus forcing a resourcefulness that authorizes their later improvement and management of other households and institutions. That is, for particular domestic women invested with the skills of the landscaper--taste, observation, and the ability to manage time, space, and people--confinement, enclosure, and stressful domestic conditions become productive, enabling feminine authority and the ability to inscape a greater range of social spaces and practices.

After a lifetime of dedicated service, including the heroic rescue of the Longland family's children from a fire that leaves her lame, Mrs. Mason is left with no place to retire when Lord Lintop, who has been spoiled by Jenny's mismanagement, inherits the estate. Tellingly, his first "improvement" is to eliminate all the cottages on the estate, including the one that the family had promised for her lifetime of loyalty and successful management of children and servants. It is at this juncture that the instability of interior,

domestic politics reflects the landscape and its social relations. Lord Lintop's corrupt character is reflected in the selfish leveling of the cottages for either aesthetic effect or economic gain (110). Aristocratic neglect and indolence lead to the corruption of the estate and the depopulation of the landscape. Implicit in Lord Longlands' "improvements" is a critique of the excesses and injustice of irresponsible landscaping--the opening of "the prospect" without regard for those who work on the estate or those who have earned a place in its community. Although Mr. Stewart does attempt to dissuade Lord Longlands from destroying the cottages and the communal way of life they represent, he is unsuccessful. As Mary tells Mrs. Mason, "All that he could do, however, was to prevent the poor cottars from being turned out for another term" (115).

The well-meaning Mr. Stewart is unable to stop the depeopling of the landscape, nor the wasteful habits of the Glenburnie cottagers. The male steward's failure is ultimately a domestic one, reflected in his inability to control his elder daughter's selfish behavior and pretensions. He is therefore ineffective indoors as well as out, suggesting that women are more assiduous managers of social relations, specifically the lower classes, because of their successful negotiation of the physical and social constraints of interior, domestic spaces and the ways in which these spaces reveal human nature. Final proof of female efficacy is mirrored in the novel's latter episode of detection, in which Mrs. Mason manages to restore harmony within the bourgeois Stewart household by revealing the humble beginnings and false pretensions of Belle's suitor.

In contrast with male landscapers' selfishness or ineptness, the middle-class woman's practical knowledge and sympathy enable her to successfully reform individual households as well as village life. The novel's argument for the interdependence of

domestic, private relationships and more public, exterior spaces and commitments is reflected in its critique of those who traditionally have the power to shape them. The Longlands' unjust landscaping represents the inability of the aristocracy to recognize the middle-class ideals of meritocracy, and to award those women with the specialized skills for household management—whether the educated supervision of children, the careful and methodic nursing of the sick, or the everyday ordering of rooms and possessions in ways that afford the most comfort and create leisure for self-reflection and individual development.

While the country house's interior and grounds are barely sketched—it is domestic networks and rivalries as well as objects like embroidered chair covers and lace that define the social space of Hill Castle—Mrs. Mason's removal to Glenburnie is saturated with the discourse of landscape aesthetics. Indeed, the narrator's appropriation of this discourse is most pronounced when Mrs. Mason travels. She insists on moving to her last relative's village where she believes she can do the most good, rather than residing more comfortably with the Stewarts. Mrs. Mason's view of the countryside on their approach underscores her aesthetic eye and her appreciation of landscape:

They had not proceeded many paces, until they were struck with admiration at the uncommon wildness of the scene, which now opened to their view. The rocks which seemed to guard the entrance of the Glen, were abrupt and savage, and approached so near each other, that one could suppose them to have been riven asunder, to give a passage to the clear stream which flowed between them. As they advanced, the hills receded on either side, making room for meadows, and corn fields, through which the rapid burn pursued its way, in many a fantastic maze. (124-125)

This description incorporates the undomesticated, wild nature of the sublime and the picturesque so beloved by tourist, landscape theorist, and landowner alike, in which the "uncommon wildness," its "savage" and "abrupt" nature were believed to stimulate the

gentleman viewer's imagination and emotions. But the sublime and picturesque are quickly addressed and then discarded, replaced by a feminine discourse that supports a more domestic, moralized landscape of human meaning and familial relationships:

If the reader is a traveller, he must know, and if he is a speculator in canals he must regret, that rivers have in general a trick of running out of the straight line. But however they may in this resemble the moral conduct of man, it is but doing justice to these favourite children of nature to observe, that in all their wanderings each stream follows the strict injunctions of its parent, and never for a moment loses its original character...The meadows and corn-fields, indeed, seemed very evidently to have been encroachments made by stealth on the sylvan reign: for none had their outlines marked with the mathematical precision, in which the modern improver delights. (125-126)

In this passage, the physical landscape is infused with the domestic values of kinship, individual character, and "moral conduct," yet the narrator/protagonist maintains the leisured position of one capable and entitled to read rural scenery and to moralize it. Nor does Hamilton miss the opportunity to skewer the opportunism and alienating abstraction of the speculator as well as the modern improver who neglect the social and moral significance of landscape.

Their journey and the humanizing rhetoric of landscape is comically, but strategically interrupted when a neglected bridge results in the overturning of a cottager's cart. Mr. Stewart chides the local peasant for not following his earlier instructions to fix the bridge, which, he points out would have been easily maintained with collective effort. The peasant's response that "we coud'na be fashed" signals the Scottish dialect that both established the work as authentically local and distinguished the middle-class English subjectivity of author and protagonist, thereby distancing the Scottish people from those who are deemed as qualified to improve their lot (133). (While Hamilton was romantically invested in her heritage and its particular landscape and customs, she also viewed the Scottish people in a paternalistic manner, an attitude influenced by her



middle-class status, her travels, her philanthropic and literary position in Edinburgh, and her intellectual life in London--all contexts that enabled her to claim a sense of Englishness that authorized her writing and mobility).

Thus, Hamilton's critique of the excesses and abstractions of picturesque landscape appropriates the distancing effect of the aesthetic observer, but in order to advance the management of class relations through an emphasis on women's domestic expertise. While she claims the attentive qualities and commitment to class harmony that Price practiced on the estate, hers is a paternalism interiorized, yet mobile, able to reshape from within the household, a wider, rural landscape through the mobilization of a more efficient, rational, comfortable way of life. Mary and Mrs. Mason remain "passive observers" while Mr. Stewart oversees the repairing of the bridge, but the locals refuse to complete the job, arguing that "it'll do weel enough" (134). This outdoor encounter underscores the ineffectiveness of what the novel posits as Mr. Stewart's otherwise rational, humane intentions to "steward" land, resources, and people as the overseer of an estate. Mrs. Mason will confront similar resistance but will effectively reform the cottagers and their work ethic from within the household, inculcating values of industry and efficiency that will have a ripple effect, reviving and creating a more orderly landscape than the steward who approaches class relationships and their spatial configurations through exterior measures and commands.

Emerging from the dreamlike quality of the "beauty of the scene," the travelers arrive at the top of the Glen, giving them a bird's eye view of the village (134). But instead of encountering a picturesque scene of dilapidated cottages dotting the landscape, a convention in rural paintings that Ruskin would later attack in his *Modern Painters*,

they approach thirty cottages," which, but for their chimneys and the smoke that issued from them, might have passed for so many stables or hog sties" (134). Pleasing distances and contrasting colors and textures quickly dissolve into a detailed domestic realism, a very close, intimate view of dirt, decay, and neglect that was so lovely from a distance. After surveying the village, Mrs. Mason is confronted with cottage belonging to her cousin, Mrs. MacClarty, which is splattered with mud and obstructed by a dunghill, and a lack of paving stones that create puddles of "dirty water" discarded from the house (134).

Of course, the rural village is a common feature in turn of the century travel guides and fiction. It is almost always treated as a part of the setting or landscape that the traveller perhaps appreciates but always leaves behind--a quaint portraiture to be entered and left according to the aesthetic observers' whim. Rarely does it become an object of reform and intervention as it does in Hamilton's *Cottagers*. Mrs. Mason is able to both appreciate the village as an object of the landscape, while becoming critically engaged in its reform. While she refers to the cottages' appearance as "so many stables or hog sties," her desire is not to level them or landscape them out of existence as the aristocratic Longlands do on their estate, nor to leave them behind with the casual observers distaste, nor to transform them into a nostalgic lament à la Wordsworth; instead, she enters the landscape in order to transform it in a piecemeal fashion from within individual households and the domestication of the village school.

This latter section of the novel involves a new set of domestic trials for Mrs. Mason, whose relatives resist her multiple attempts to improve the cottage's comfort and hygiene through orderly methods. One chapter fittingly entitled "A Peep Behind the Curtain" reflects Hamilton's appeal to a middle-class audience, with a title resembling

later Victorian exposes of working-class urban conditions in industrial cities such as Manchester that both horrified and titillated its readers with the shocking details of how the "other half" lived. As Mrs. Mason, "casts her exploring eye on the house and furniture," she is impressed with the stock of fine linen but distressed by the lack of fabric for general use, i.e. cleanliness and comfort (143). Soon after, however, Mrs. Mason's (and the middle-class reader's) senses are assaulted with myriad forms of dirt and "intolerable effluvia" (162). The windows are sealed shut and coated with grime, the morning rituals reveal chaos and lack of sanitation, bed bugs torment her with their fangs, hairs in the butter disgust her, and her ears are "assailed by the harsh form of discord" (195). All of her physical senses are exhausted in this part of the narrative, prompting Mrs. Mason to escape the cottage and its "squashy pool, and its neighbor the dunghill," and to find solace in the surrounding scenery (192). But her appreciation of the landscape is, again, not simply or romantically aesthetic. Her encounter with nature is distinguished by "gratitude" to God and a renewal of social responsibility rather than an opportunity for solitary reverie or poetic inspiration:

Seating herself upon a projecting rock, she contemplated the effulgent glory of the heavens, as they brightened into splendour at the approach of the lord of the day . . . The good woman's heart glowed with rapture: but it did not vainly glow, as does the heart or the imagination of many a pretender to superior taste; for the rapture of her heart was fraught with gratitude . . . "The eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing;" and he who implanted these desires, has he not mercifully provided for their gratification? What are all the works of Man compared with the grandeur of such a scene? But the sights that are designed by man, as proofs of his creative skill are only to be seen by the rich and the great; while the glorious works of God are exhibited to all. Pursuing this thought a little farther, it occurred to Mrs. Mason, that all that is rare, is in general useless; and that all that is most truly valuable is given in common, and placed within the reach of the poor and the lowly. (193-194)

In her protagonist, Hamilton celebrates a woman's ability to appreciate natural scenery in terms of feminine sympathy and a belief in Christian providence and good works. As in

the novel's previous descriptions of landscape, there is a critique of the excesses and inaccessibility of the art of landscape gardening, of artificial display and the denial of community and communal relations associated with landed proprietors lacking a humanized spirit of improvement. Works "designed by man" are displaced in favor of a female subjectivity whose focus on everyday life and "habits of neatness, activity, and attention" frames her vision of landscape. Despite the protagonist's economic dependence, her aesthetic appreciation of rural landscape and pleasure in the outdoors underwrite her gradual transformation of the village from the inside out, one cottage at a time.

Hamilton's novel also figures the individual, or domestic garden as a site for women's practical reform. Her critique of the MacClarty's excess stock of fine linen while neglecting or lacking cloth for everyday cleaning is extended to the cottage garden as well, where she sees aristocratic pretensions undermining its use as a space for cultivating habits of industry, self-reliance, and stretching the household's scanty resources. Accompanied by Mary Stewart on her arrival at the MacClarty home, the women with middle-class tastes for a well-tended garden that combines ornamental flowers with produce admonish the cottagers for its neglect. Unable at first to enter the garden because of its broken gate, "until the stake which propped it was removed," they are shocked to encounter a garden as dirty and unsanitary as the home: "the path which was very narrow, was damp, by sippings from the dirty pool; and on each side of it, the ground immediately rose, and the docks and nettles which covered it, consequently grew so high, that they had no alternative but to walk sideways, or to separate" (156). Mrs. MacClarty nevertheless calls it a "bonny garden," overseen by her son, who, she

proclaims proudly, "would do any thing for flowers" rather than use what is sufficient ground, according to Mrs. Mason, for growing fruit and vegetables (156). After Mrs. Mason notes Mr. MacClarty's lack of "taste" for the garden, Miss Mary suggests methods of improvement, reflecting her own experience with the layout and cultivation of the proper bourgeois garden: "Were your children to dress and weed this garden; there, might be a pretty walk; there, you might have a plot of green pease, there, another of beans, and under your window you might have a nice border of flowers to regale you with their sweet smell" (157).

A middle-class feminine taste for gardening is figured here as essential to the cultivation of the domestic sphere, and landscape a necessary extension of a feminine domain. Crucial to this taste is an emphasis on women's position within the domestic space and the home. Hence, Mary suggests that the properly managed garden would produce food for the wife's cooking, but also flowers that she could see from her window which would refresh her and restore her from the exhaustion of household work.

Elizabeth Bohls has concluded that women's interventions in landscape aesthetics are often diminished or contained within a set of social conventions, in which 'ladies' were allowed to sketch picturesque scenery and to take an interest in landscape only under the rubric of feminine accomplishments. However, Hamilton appropriates the popular tableau of landscape painting and picturesque tourist literature, "the farmer's inglenook," often associated with stasis, nostalgia, and an elite perspective, and uses it quite aggressively as a vehicle for social reform. Coded as a solidly middle-class woman who is sympathetic rather than sentimental, Mrs. Mason responds to the dirty trials of everyday life through Christian principles of cleanliness, hygiene and domestic order. In

a sense, she enters the portrait, the nostalgic image of rural life that usually connotes at once class difference and aesthetic distance, and improves it through intimate contact with and management of the rural poor.

But this task is neither easy nor disinterested. Despite her attempts to reorganize the MacClarty household through the division of labor, an emphasis on cleanliness and ventilation, the insistence on using specific objects for specific tasks, her cousin's family rejects her reforms. Mrs. Mason's professional expertise in domestic contexts is made evident in her frequent emphasis on the management of infection, disease, and bad air--a focus that insists on creating a "healthy" flow of light and air between the cottage interior and the healthy, rural outdoors. While "her discourse on the nature of infection" falls on deaf ears with most of Glenburnie, this specialized language marks her superior social standing in the village and appeals to a middle-class audience for whom management of the home, the individual, and disease replaces the management of the estate in a developing capitalist culture where women play a significant mediating role (236). When Mr. MacClarty falls ill, rather than wanting to simply take care of him or nurse him, she insists on gleaning the best means of "managing his disorder" (224). But the family's continued resistance to Mrs. Mason's plans forces her to move to another, more manageable household. (Not surprisingly, the MacClartys fall further into misery and poverty with their cousin's removal).

Hamilton relegates management to those who are coded as middle-class subjects with an education and sense of perspective that includes spatial and aesthetic sensibility. William and Peggy Morrison, humbler than the MacClartys, welcome Mrs. Mason into their home. "Stranger[s] to the pride that scorns instruction," the Morrisons embrace

their lodger's principles of industry and organization (352). Unlike the MacClartys, they are willing "to do every thing in its proper time; to keep everything to its proper use; and to put everything in its proper place" (350-51). Soon, the reformed cottagers attract the attention of their neighbors, who are dazzled by the appearance of comfort, but who still 'canna be fashed.' Impressed by his good nature and malleability, Mrs. Mason arranges for William, a merchant in debt, to become schoolmaster of Glenburnie, whose qualifications, according to the village minister, stem from his *tabula rasa* nature: "Then, as you are not wedded to any particular method, you will honestly enquire and candidly follow, what appears to be the best; nor obstinately refuse to adopt suggestions that are suggested by others, when their utility has been placed beyond a doubt" (367).

With the blessing of the minister, Mrs. Mason, William Morrison, and his family relocate to the house provided for the schoolmaster. Because of the neglect of the former instructor, the house and school building require some renovations, changes that herald the reformation of the village through its children, who, through education, find pleasure in improving the landscape of the entire village:

The house allotted to the village teacher was large, but so ill planned as to be incommodious and uncomfortable. The alterations suggested by Mrs. Mason removed these objections, and were favourable to her plans of order and cleanliness. A useless appendage, which projected by the back-door entrance, and which had hitherto been the receptacle of dirt and rubbish, was converted into a nice scullery, where the washing of clothes and dishes was carried on, so that the kitchen was kept unmolested...Those who had known the house in its former condition, were amazed at the transformation and could scarcely believe that such a change could be effected without the help of enchantment. Nor was it the inside of the house that the transformation was confined; without doors it was perhaps still more remarkable. The school-house being set back from the street, left an area of the width of ten or twelve yards in front of the house; and on this convenient spot, the former incumbent had erected a pigsty . . . Morrison having removed the encumbrances, sowed the area with grass-seeds, and round it made a border to be filled with flowers and shrubs. It was then railed in, leaving a road up to the school, and an entrance, by a neat wicker gate, to the front door of the dwelling

house. Planting, watering, and rearing the shrubs and flowers, which ornamented the borders of the grass-plot, became the favourite amusement of the elder schoolboys; and being the reward of good behavior, was considered as a mark of favour all were ambitious to obtain. (383-385)

The resistant cottagers, attached to the "gude auld gait," are nevertheless affected by the beauty and order of the renovated schoolhouse and its attached home, "... which foreboded the improvements that were speedily to take place in the village of Glenburnie. These had their origin in the spirit of emulation excited among the elder boys, for the external appearance of their respective homes. The girls exerted themselves with no less activity, to effect a reformation within doors . . ." (397). In this tableau, Hamilton implies that the garden model is fertile and will spread with the continued "reformation" indoors as well as out leading to a managed productivity rather than uncontrolled growth.

In Hamilton's plan, landscape husbandry, the balance of beauty and order, aesthetics and usefulness, indeed their marrying, are achieved by an emphasis on the reciprocal, fluid relationship between interior and exterior arrangements and usage of space through the collaboration of women and men, girls and boys. With her emphasis on cottage improvements, alterations, and useful enclosures, the protagonist restructures the village with her own particular strain of domestic masonry, her name signifying the more practical attention to housing rather than the masculine province of "architecture"--the cathedral or the country house, for example.

Despite her age and infirmity, Mrs. Mason patiently remakes the village cottages and their inhabitants, instilling principles of cleanliness, hygiene, and order, as well as infusing more tenuous values such as taste, duty, and decorum. She repeatedly uses metaphors for land and its husbandry to instruct cottagers on how to raise their children, comparing unruly, disobedient sons and daughters to "fields" requiring "plowing" and



"proper manure" (169). At the novel's close, Mrs. Mason takes over the supervision of the village school; using an educational method Hamilton admired at the time, the heroine divides the students into classes of "landlords" and "tenants" whose educational instruments are hoes, spades, and seeds, tools intended to improve at once the aesthetic and moral value of the village. Mrs. Mason's inscaping of the rural poor works to authorize middle-class women's social roles as active producers and caretakers of a moralized landscape aesthetic meant to heal or at least buffer class tensions. Finally, Elizabeth Hamilton's novel of village reform must be read as an extension of her own privileged sense of physical and social mobility, of global imperial relations, and, finally, her identification with English rather than Scottish domestic habits that collapse or conflate national and private notions of the domestic through the remaking of the single-family cottage.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Qtd in Elizabeth Benger, *Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton, with a Selection from Her Correspondence, and other Unpublished Writings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn., Volume 1. London: Longman, Hurst, Reese, Orme, & Brown, 1819, 209-210. All following references to Hamilton's letters and Benger's commentary come from this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: a Political History of the Novel*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-64*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Beth Tobin, *Superintending the Poor: Charitable Ladies and Paternal Landlords in British Fiction, 1770-1860*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987.

<sup>6</sup> Jacqueline Labbe, *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender, and Romanticism*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998, x.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine*. New York: Methuen, 1987.

<sup>9</sup> Labbe, *Romantic Visualities*, xix.

<sup>10</sup> Labbe, *Romantic Visualities*, xix.

<sup>11</sup> Hamilton's *Modern Philosophers*, for example, a novel that has been read by recent critics like Patrick Kelly as a conservative text in its critique of the excesses of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft's philosophies of individualism and social progress, features sympathetic characters with rational, rather than Romantic relationships to the garden—with interests in botany, horticulture, and gardening that look simultaneously inward towards the home and domestic values of privacy and individualism as well as outwards as a medium for cultivating social values of ministering to and instructing others in need of moral reform.

<sup>12</sup> All references to Elizabeth Hamilton's *The Cottagers of Glenburnie: A Tale for the Farmer's Ingle-nook* (1808), ed. Gina Luria, London: Garland Publishing, 1974.

<sup>13</sup> Benger, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Benger provides a footnote to further describe the charms of Ingram's Crook: "It received the name of Ingram's Crook, from the circumstance of Sir John Ingram, an English knight, having, in his flight from the battle of Bannockburn, been driven into a stream where he perished. This stream, bending at that spot, forms a small peninsula, adjoining to which, Mr. Hamilton's habitation was built; a neat thatched cottage, which, during the summer, was covered to the chimney tops with woodbines and roses: it was enclosed within a court, and formed a picturesque object, just peeping from the embowering shades of the orchards, and other plantations" (48).

<sup>15</sup> In Benger, Hamilton further pursues "castle-building" as a metaphor for the feminine imagination in her letter to a female friend and co-traveler (140-41).

<sup>16</sup> Janice Ferrar Thaddeus, "Elizabeth Hamilton's Domestic Politics," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 23 (1994): 265-84.

<sup>17</sup> All references to Elizabeth Hamilton's text from *The Cottagers of Glenburnie: A Tale for the Farmer's Ingle-nook* (1808), ed. Gina Luria, London & New York: Garland Publishing, 1974.

<sup>18</sup> Claire Grogan, "Crossing Genre, Gender and Race in Elizabeth Hamilton's Translation of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah," *Studies in the Novel*, 34 (2002): 21-42. Grogan argues that Hamilton adapts masculine genres of Orientalism to "create her own brand of Orientalist study," in order to display her intellectual and literary abilities (28).

<sup>19</sup> Patrick Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution, 1790-1827*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. Praised by journals like the *Anti-Jacobin* as "the first novel of the day," her initial literary success, *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, uses the feminized genre of the novel of manners to critique what she saw as the excesses of Godwin's radical philosophy of individualism. Through the contrasting characters of Bridgetina and Harriet, Hamilton argues for women's individuality and autonomy, albeit within a decidedly domestic context, in order to alleviate fears of revolution in England.

<sup>20</sup> Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution*, 265. Yet Kelly often softens her literary interventions by insisting on clear-cut distinctions between masculine and feminine discourses and their respective powers, accepting these lines as fixed rather than under construction. For example, he reads her *Letters of a Hindoo Raja*, as an attempt "to find an acceptably feminine way of carrying on her brother's Orientalist project;" thus, Kelly frames Hamilton's colonial narrative as an extension of her brother Charles, and his enlistment as an officer in the East India Company, a diluted, more feminine representation of his fierce commitment to writing a history of the Rohilla war that would advance the Orientalist project (133).

<sup>21</sup> Thaddeus, 269, 266.

CHAPTER 3  
JANE AND JOHN LOUDON'S GARDENING MANUALS AND VISIONS OF A  
GARDENESQUE ENGLAND

The great point is to exercise our skill and ingenuity, for we all feel so much more interested in what we do ourselves than in what is done for us, that no lady is likely to become fond of gardening who does not do a great deal with her own hands.

--Jane Loudon, *Gardening for Ladies* (1840).

Drawing on the history of a contested picturesque and politics of landscape, this chapter will depart from literary representations of landscape to focus on the Victorian middle class's stewardship of landscaping as a profession and a medium for identity and self-expression and women's participation in the manufacture of a gardenesque lifestyle. Like Elizabeth Hamilton, who in the previous chapter advocates women's participation in social criticism and reform of the working classes through a tutelary use of landscape, John and Jane Loudon combine ideologies of landscape with the middle-class interests in cultivating individualism and ideals of domesticity. And like Hamilton's industrious Mrs. Mason, the Loudons and like-minded writers of the middle classes use the feminized domain of home to critique the picturesque, an eighteenth-century category of aesthetics deemed hostile to a nation they believed needed rejuvenation through the arts of domesticity.

Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have already recognized John Loudon's practical contribution to the consolidation of the middle-class family in British society in his guides to suburban living, seeing his architectural plans and garden ideology as providing key material contributions to middle-class hegemony.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, historians like

Paul Johnson and Melanie Simo have championed John Loudon as one of the most influential figures in 19th century British culture for his extensive contributions to journals and encyclopedias on gardening, agriculture, architecture and landscaping.<sup>2</sup> However, there has been little to no extended cultural analysis of how Jane Loudon's work contributed to the burgeoning field of home and garden during the couple's most prolific period, the 1830's, 40's, and early 50's.

Yet, Jane Loudon enjoyed renown in her day not just as the wife of John Loudon, but also for her more than twenty books on the domestic arts of gardening and horticulture for the enjoyment and instruction of an expanding audience of middle-class women and children. While editing *The Ladies Companion at Home and Abroad* from December 31, 1849, to June 22, 1850, a popular magazine aimed at the "thinking" woman, she contributed regular columns on gardening, interior design, natural history and current events in and surrounding the metropolis, as well as a range of editorials including the subjects of women's education, philanthropic institutions for seamstresses, shopgirls, and widows, household management, and marriage. While fashioning herself and her work as that of an amateur, the lifelong student of highly demanding, well-educated mentor and husband, she nevertheless led a very active, public life both as an assiduous assistant to and travelling companion for her husband, as well as an independent writer, editor, and "woman garden journalist."<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter I will emphasize Jane Loudon's critical contributions to the gardenesque extension of the domestic sphere and her promotion of a middle-class feminine identity expressed, in part, through her relationship to the garden and gardening. Self improvement or self-cultivation, in fact, is one of the key components of Jane

Loudon's landscape ideology, for it provides more opportunities for establishing a distinctive middle-class feminine identity, more stages, or platforms for self expression and the anchoring of middle-class status in the midst of economic insecurity and social change. As Elizabeth Langland points out in *Nobody's Angels*, the home becomes a "theater for the staging of a family's social position," in the nineteenth century, and, I would add, this theater includes the middle-class manufacture of a gardenesque aesthetic.<sup>4</sup> If the joys of suburban gardening enable men of the prosperous middle classes to reproduce in the suburbs the illusion of Arcadia and its associations, they allow women a new range of discourses, activities, and interests to secure their own sense of bourgeois prosperity as well as self-reliance.

In addition to the absence of Jane Loudon in cultural histories of nineteenth-century Britain, there has been only cursory attention given to the wife and husband's complementary, though gendered approaches to landscape aesthetics and the home. In this chapter, I argue that John and Jane Loudon's corollary publications in landscape architecture and gardening represent how a select group of middle-class men and women stake a claim in the management of a more socially and economically fluid nation. The Loudons' collaboration also illustrates how taste for the pursuits of gardening and landscape both shores up and enables social and physical mobility for the middle classes intent on defining themselves through professions from horticultural literature to sanitary reform that corresponded to a healthy domestic sphere. Both capitalized on and fed Britain's passion for improving domestic life through the cultivation of gardens and the appreciation of landscape, but approached this shared enterprise in different ways, ways that intended to mark them as man and woman with the kind of vision, sensitivity, and

knowledge required for interpreting, cataloguing, and demonstrating proper modes of living and leisure activities considered to be appropriate and productive.

Thus, in the Loudons' prose, the garden becomes an ideologically charged space where the middle classes have seemingly "endless" opportunities to express their devotion to domestic life and its virtues. Part of the middle-class response to anxieties about capitalist production and an urbanized landscape, the modest garden of the Victorian period becomes the place where the family's interior life and social status can be exteriorized and performed, a locale where the household's domestic harmony can be manifested outside the physical confines of the house proper. Crucially, this a heterosexual affair in which master and mistress' shared pleasure in the outdoors and the healthy activities associated with gardening reflect their interiority, their depth and subjectivity as thinking, feeling individuals capable of managerial skills and expertise in a range of institutions and social spaces. While the gardenesque fulfills men's fantasies of proprietorship, this extension of the domestic sphere allows a new space for women's self-cultivation and provides a remarkably elastic domain in which the garden becomes a forum for social commentary and ideological work that exceeds the household and the immediate concerns of family and the private sphere.

In order to appreciate Jane Loudon's hand in these developments, however, it is important to establish that both John and Jane Loudon shared a belief in the civilizing, progressive force of landscape and domestic architecture: the conviction that these fields or "art[s] of culture"<sup>5</sup> could contribute not just to the comforts of individual homes but to human progress and social harmony in general. As Elizabeth Langland and Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall foreground in their studies of British culture and the politics

of domesticity, the upper-middle classes' cultural capital rested in its control of representation, particularly through bourgeois notions of taste and improvement. These studies provide the theoretical basis for expanding our conceptions of middle-class cultural capital to include a complex production of domestic ideology amplified in the popular expansion of the middle-class garden, yet also modify older traditions and discourses of rural and urban, country and city contexts. As Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the legitimizing force of cultural consumption and aesthetics suggests, the Loudons' interest in cultivating a widespread taste for the pleasures of home and garden provides an anxious middle class with a new field of expertise and a sense of control over space(s) and the identity this power confers.<sup>6</sup>

The Loudons' publications provided the hungry middle classes with numerous illustrations and descriptions of the ideal home and garden aesthetic and how to achieve it, functioning as domestic conduct books with elaborate guidelines for garden layouts and specific instructions for the cultivation of an expanding market of species. One of the most expressive examples of their domestication of landscape for the consolidation of the middle classes appears in Loudon's *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion* (1838), where John Loudon celebrates a domesticated Eden and the pleasures of home:

What can be more rational than the satisfaction which the master of the house enjoys, when he returns from the city to his garden in the summer evenings and applies the syringe . . . What can be more refreshing than, in a warm summer's evening, to hear, while sitting in the parlour with the windows open, or in a summer-house, the showering of water by the syringe upon the leaves of the vines or fig trees trained under the adjoining veranda . . . What more delightful than to see the master or the mistress of a small garden or pleasure ground, with all the boys and girls, and maids, and, in short, all the strength of the house, carrying pots and pails . . .<sup>7</sup>

Emphasizing the suburban garden's "endless variety," Loudon's vision cultivates the satisfying fiction of the self-sufficient estate which the entire household works in



harmony to maintain once the man has left the city.<sup>8</sup> The syringe suggests a fantasy of masculine fertility and plenitude, in which the home and surrounding garden or exterior provide endless possibilities for domestic labor and happiness. Most, significant, however, is the pleasure he derives from a system of organic labor in both the “master” and “mistress” can oversee and enjoy the fruits of productivity at home, a sense of community and the symbols of fertility.

The stated purpose of John Loudon’s *Suburban Gardener* is to help men acquire a taste for rural pleasures, but this taste goes hand-in-hand with the pleasures of domesticity and celebrates the privileges and sense of autonomy that proprietorship afforded the previous century’s larger landowners and aristocracy.<sup>9</sup> In contrast with the excess of the eighteenth-century landscape park, its overly manicured lawns and sweeping prospect, the Loudons emphasize fertility and self-sufficiency, reflecting the desires of the nineteenth-century middle classes for whom these qualities could only be performed within the smaller, specialized spaces of modern life.

The Loudons’ published tours, manuals, and encyclopedias of architecture, gardening, and natural history, as well as children’s fiction, illuminate how conceptions of landscape and domestic ideology are inextricably fused in Victorian culture. This emphasis provides the conceptual means for exploring how Victorian domesticity becomes the means for negotiating, the frightening complexity and seeming anarchy of modernity. The Loudons’ home, office, and carefully cultivated gardens at No. 3 Porchester Terrace, in the London suburb of Bayswater where they wrote, compiled, and edited works on landscaping, architecture, and gardening, is the spatial realization of the

overlapping, and interdependent fields of bourgeois domesticity and the overlapping developments of nineteenth-century science, technology, and commerce.

Thus, I would argue that between the turn of the century and the mid-Victorian period, the masculine domain of landscape and the feminine sphere of the domestic become interdependent and fluid social constructs, enabling and policing class identity and borders. As this chapter will trace, these domains are harmonized through middle-class definitions of leisure, and reconstituted in terms of a moralized, productive home life realized within the flexible boundaries of home and garden. If landscape and landscaping are often conceived as exterior practices associated with masculinist views of nature and conceptions of space, the Loudons' collaborative work shows how middle-class men and women share ideologies of domestic life, progress, and improvement that undermine the gendered distinctions between privacy, home life, and the rural on the one hand, and the public life of work and politics represented by the metropolis and industrial cities on the other.

Yet British historians like H.L. Malchow and Martin Gaskell have positioned the field of home and gardening as a negative or suspect cultural development, an essential aspect of Britain's suburbanization that represents middle-class conspicuous consumption and affluent retreat from the violence of poverty and the social ills associated with London and the industrial towns.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, cultural historians like Robert Fishman and Paul Johnson have interpreted the Loudon enterprise as representative of the Victorian desire to stem the destabilizing effects of modernity through protective garden walls and expensive suburban villas.<sup>11</sup>

Accompanying these prescriptive views is the assumption that by the mid-nineteenth century, landscape gardening and the picturesque were no longer significant categories of public interest, that they had become merely remnants of a previous century's excess that were imitated by the socially ambitious and upwardly mobile. As one garden historian has put it, nineteenth-century landscaping, while "still conceived with a spacious sweep, began to be somewhat contracted. The population was increasing and the social emphasis was shifting. Landscape gardening persisted, but of course on a smaller scale, with a diminished perspective."<sup>12</sup> Even Peter Bailey's otherwise comprehensive study of the mid-Victorians' "legitimate pleasures" that includes expanded opportunities for entertaining at home and excursions to the sea and countryside gives only glancing mention of the garden in the extension of "a new leisure world" and gives no mention of either Loudon in promoting "the improved amenities of domestic life."<sup>13</sup>

These accounts overlook the cultural significance of nineteenth-century gardening and landscape as well as the adaptability of landscape discourse to a range of socioeconomic classes and positions, especially to women's interventions in the national discourse of improvement and social reform. I would argue that with the rise of the middle classes and the expansion of a literate populace with access to rural imagery and ideals, if not the land, money, and labor, the ideologies and methods of landscape are redirected and concentrated rather than simply contracted. The garden and gardenesque provided a space and an aesthetic for negotiating social change, consolidating middle-class expertise while also sincerely seeking the humanitarian goals of greater social

equality of housing and less material domestic resources they considered essential to individual fulfillment like the cultivation of solace, self-reliance, and reflection.

Undoubtedly, the middle classes' anxieties about economic uncertainty and social change fostered the need to regulate and control the domestic sphere. Indeed, John Loudon himself, the son of a prosperous Scottish farmer, lost the fortune he amassed from his early landscape projects to bad investments and fell into debt with the expensive production of his eight-volume *Arboretum et Fruticetum Britannicum* (1838), leaving him hounded by creditors until his death. Jane Webb Loudon was never free of financial worries either; she had to step up her number of publications on floriculture, botany, and gardening for women and children to ease her husband's debts, and later continued writing to support herself as a widow and single mother. These financial pressures highlight the ideological stakes of the Loudons' collective enterprise. The upwardly mobile Scotsman's embraced a profession that celebrated the Englishness of a domesticated landscape. Jane Loudon carved out a career as an expert on women's gardening, making it appropriately genteel for women to "dig" while seeking to financially support herself and her family within the codes of feminine decorum and familial duty.

Middle-class men and women's complementary responses to social instability and financial pressures are demonstrated in the literature of gardening and landscape. These texts show how landscaping as an active process is indissolubly linked to inscaping, the reproduction and dissemination of landscape principles reconstituted in the domestic sphere. In an increasingly mobile, urbanized culture, these principles become essential to

middle-class hegemony in domestic matters and social life, defining what constitutes a moral, productive home and family life.

Though he intended to stake out his own contribution to a rich landscape tradition that presupposed much larger stretches of land and money, John Loudon's gardenesque aesthetic was intended to be accessible and adaptable to a wide range of incomes and circumstances and included an emphasis on the practical and scientific benefits of gardening over the aristocratic decadence of the picturesque of the previous century. However, Loudon's garden aesthetic also reflects middle-class anxiety about work and definitions of work in a capitalist society and economic world that alienated its members from older, if idealized forms of labor. Loudon makes this anxiety clear in his *Suburban Gardener* when he emphasizes the value of labor for home and garden improvement and celebrates the unlimited nature of what can be done or produced within a limited domestic space:

One of the greatest of all the sources of enjoyment resulting from the possession of a garden is, is the endless variety which it produces, either by the perpetual progress of vegetation which is going forward in it to maturity, dormancy or decay, or by the almost innumerable kinds of plants which may be raised in even the smallest garden.<sup>14</sup>

Loudon celebrates the garden's associations with industry, science, and progress within a domestic context. He sees these values reflected in the gardener's ability to regulate this space through a meticulous attention to detail, patience, and self-control. Loudon's passionate description of the suburban garden's joys suggests the domestic sphere was an alternate place to display the work of one's hands, if it could not be sufficiently demonstrated in the workplace or office.

Karen Chase and Michael Levenson have argued that the nineteenth-century reification of separate spheres created "an enlarged zone of privacy and an intensifying of

the private domain," a process that progressively eroded the distinctions between a public, civic life and "its invisible, personal contrary," a more "defined realm of privacy."<sup>15</sup> Complementing their emphasis on the expansion and magnification of the private domestic sphere, Chase and Levenson argue that class anxiety yields a "domestic mysticism," a fetishization of the household that captivated even the most socially active and politically involved writers like Dickens, Eliot, Gaskell, and Ruskin. While they do not focus on how or why rural aesthetics functions as a key element of domestic mysticism, their work provides a foundation for addressing the pervasive effects of Victorian culture's complementary obsessions—the rural virtues and an idealized domesticity.<sup>16</sup>

Tapping into these associations, the Loudons' works are filled with images of a verdant, productive domestic environment that John defined as "gardenesque," a term that he privileged over the picturesque as an aesthetic intended to seamlessly combine home and garden, a preference that symbolically and literally brought home the landscape for an expanding group of consumers. Though the gardenesque was intended to mark his own contribution to landscaping, the traditional styles of the picturesque and the formal/geometric also presupposed large stretches of land, laborers, and capital. But Loudon insisted on his new style's accessibility and its adaptability to the respectable family of limited means and its smaller, more humble properties and households. Though a family might have limited resources, it could still enjoy domestic pleasures in their cultivation of a gardenesque sensibility.

The most significant feature of John Loudon's gardenesque ideal, then, is how it centralizes the domestic as the site of rational pleasure, a theme that effectively shapes

his politics and his vision of public life and its institutions beyond the home. Indeed, domestic ideology shapes his discourse about and designs for public parks intended for “the masses.” Not just interested in the privacy and healthful retreat of the suburban garden for the middle classes, he is also eager to apply the organizing principles of private, domestic space to public gardens intended for the “improvement” of the working classes. As the designer of the Derby Arboretum, one of the first public parks in Britain,<sup>17</sup> Loudon uses middle-class principles of domestic architecture as a template to organize the working class people into individual families enjoying the amenities of the private home:

It is essential to a festive garden that the family should assemble together in masses; and, for containing these masses, it is not only requisite to form appropriate spaces, but to connect these with subordinate and not far distant arrangements, in the same way the living rooms of a house are connected with its different servants' apartments and offices.<sup>18</sup>

The park's layout imitates the bourgeois household, in which rooms are carefully separated to provide privacy and control the assembly of family members in designated places such as the drawing room or parlour. The park designer “contain[s] the masses” as the master or mistress supervises household servants. As his plans for the public park illustrate, Loudon's landscape politics emphasizes the supremacy of domestic concerns and comforts, values that the middle classes were most fit to inculcate in others. Loudon's landscape principles become the means for managing class relations, the homes as well as the leisure habits of the poor and working classes.

As the rhetoric of his park design suggests, he cannot do this alone: indeed, women's supervision of the domestic sphere provides them with the skills to shape and extend more popular tastes for landscape, to help design and manage the leisure activities of their own class as well as those below. In the introduction to his *An Encyclopedia of*

*Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture* (1833), Loudon stresses the civilizing power of domestic architecture in the wake of the first Reform Bill, an influence best implemented by an educated, sympathetic middle class with tastes for "agricultural comforts and beauties:"

The main objective of this *Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture*, is to improve the dwellings of the great mass of society . . . a secondary objective is to create and diffuse among mankind, generally, a taste for agricultural comforts and beauties . . . by adopting such a style, as will render the work easily understood by the uninitiated reader, as well as subservient to the purpose of educating young persons in Architecture as an art of taste, especially those of the female sex.<sup>19</sup>

For Loudon, taste is an art that marks civilization itself as a domestic enterprise, in which "the mode of building" determines the nature of its inhabitants: "the mode of living and the manners, will all correspond with the appearance of the building."<sup>20</sup> In addition, his goal "to improve the dwellings of the great mass of society" reflects a more general, far-reaching interest in poor and working-class housing that would flourish in the nineteenth century, the growing middle-class attention to sanitary reform and public health—a concern nearly always assuming the middle-class home as the universal standard for civilized living.<sup>21</sup> As the later chapters of this dissertation will explore, George Eliot employs domestic ideology as a means for social reform in Dorothea Brooke's cottage plans, and Octavia Hill uses middle-class women's taste for landscape in her urban philanthropy.

In the same introduction to his architectural and landscape designs, Loudon emphasizes women's complementary role in the civilizing mission of reforming popular tastes in architecture. Loudon suggests a broader diffusive effect of architecture on individual character, believing "could we only succeed in raising the taste of the mass of society in this art, we should not only effect an universal improvement in architecture, but



materially contribute towards the universal adoption of correct and elegant habits of thinking and acting generally."<sup>22</sup> Women, are socially as well as architecturally placed, he implies, to influence "the public taste of architecture." For support, Loudon cites other male supporters of women's role in architectural reform:

And when we consider how wide is the province, how influential the authority, which the sex are apt to claim in such matters; how much, in all that regards ornamental furniture and interior embellishments, depends on the refined or trivial taste of our fairer halves . . . the elementary practice of architectural drawing, would be highly beneficial to the youthful pupils, inasmuch as it affords an immediate application of the simpler principles of geometry; as it forms the hand to correctness, the eye to scrupulous examination of forms, and, consequently implants habits of careful deliberation and attention as well as the seeds of taste.<sup>23</sup>

Both Loudon and the *Foreign Quarterly Review* author cited above insist not on the work itself, but on the habits that the practice of architectural principles will instill in women, making them better wives and mothers who are capable of managing the household with a "hand to correctness" and "careful habits of deliberation and attention." However, according to Loudon, women ultimately have the public function as a civilizing force able to inculcate an appreciation for domestic architecture and landscape in others: "If the study of landscape drawing, by ladies, has led to the improvement of landscape gardening, why should not the study of architectural drawing, on their part, lead to the improvement of domestic Architecture?"<sup>24</sup> Though implicitly invoking patriarchal control, he recognizes the power of women's domestic role and the possibilities of harnessing that influence for extending middle-class architectural and domestic values of privacy, self-cultivation, and individualism to British culture as a whole.

John Loudon advocates a social mission in which women function as apostles of taste, women had a moral obligation to use their influence to improve class relations on Britain's larger estates by taking an interest in cottage architecture. (Indeed, as evidence

of Loudon's enduring appeal to middle-class women and their cooperation in mitigating class conflict, George Eliot cites him in *Middlemarch* as Dorothea Brooke's source for her own cottage plans, which are intended to improve the cottagers' living conditions on her negligent uncle's estate). Reporting on a tour of English gardens and estates as editor for *The Gardener's Magazine* in 1831, Loudon appeals directly to women's sympathy and maternal influence as s for the absentee landlords' neglect of their tenants' and laborers' poor living conditions:

We are persuaded that many absentee landlords are ignorant of the sort of cottages which already exist, and still continue to be erected, on their estates. It is difficult for us to persuade ourselves that the wives, who are perhaps mothers, of these men of wealth, are aware of the large families that are born and live together in one small room, open to the roof, with no division but that formed by wooden bedsteads, and with no floor but earth. We cannot believe, for example, that the Duchess of Buccleugh, whom we know to be highly cultivated, and who has the reputation of being kind-hearted and charitable, ever entered any one of the fourteen cottages lately erected on one of her husband's estates, not far from his magnificent palace of Drumlanrig, in Dumfriesshire . . . We repeat, that we cannot believe that the Duchess of Buccleugh is aware that there are such cottages on her husband's Scotch estates.<sup>25</sup>

Loudon's call upon the Duchess' compassion assumes that taste in landscape and sympathy for its social relations are interrelated, feminine qualities. That is, implicit in his appeal is the assumption that women's taste for country life also gives them the needed sympathy to alleviate the effects of a failed paternalism, the ability to improve living conditions for the lower classes and thereby mitigate class hostility and conflict.

While John Loudon addresses the aristocratic woman's philanthropic duty in the previous passage, he was much more concerned with the inculcation of this sympathetic taste in the middle classes and its women, for these comprised both his clients and audience.<sup>26</sup> As his depiction of the model home, the public park, and the country estate demonstrate, the "mistress" is integral to these places, their production and maintenance.

The following section will explore how Jane Loudon built an influential writing career based on her shared belief in the middle-class woman's complementary role in the cultivation of gardenesque values and the extension of the domestic sphere to the garden. This next section will also explore how Jane Loudon's definition of a practical, rational taste for the garden and landscape became the means for participating in a long nineteenth-century critique of the picturesque. In addition to emphasizing the superior management skills of the middle-class women over and against working-class women, Loudon participates in a critique of aristocratic women and their association with an artificial femininity perceived as ultimately hostile to domestic and national health.

Jane Loudon, the Suburban Garden, and the Arts of Self-Cultivation

Suburban gardens generally give more pleasure to their possessors than gardens of more importance; principally, perhaps, because they are seldom, if ever, under the control of a master gardener; but are managed by the lady of the house; and thus a suburban garden becomes a kind of domestic pet, for we always love things that are partly of our own creation.

--Jane Loudon, from *The Ladies' Companion*<sup>27</sup>

Sadly, but not altogether surprisingly, Jane Webb London's literary and cultural contributions to British society have been consistently domesticated and overlooked; indeed, historical and biographical accounts of the Loudons have relegated her work to a separate, gendered space of influence—always treating it as a subcategory of John London's more generalized encyclopedias and landscaping expertise. In his historical survey of modernism, Paul Johnson reestablishes this gendered hierarchy when he assigns both Jane Loudon's lady gardener and Mrs. Beeton's household manager to traditional feminine roles, in which "Jane Loudon taught ladies of leisure how to garden in the same way Mrs. Beeton taught them to cook;" in contrast, Johnson claims John Loudon "helped to lay the foundation for the optimism which was to characterize the

Victorian era and, in his own way, was one of the most influential minds of the century."<sup>28</sup> Similarly, John Gloag's biography of John Loudon as well as Geoffrey Taylor's discussion of the couple as influential gardeners emphasize Jane Loudon's role as her husband's amanuensis, whose travels, collaboration, and publications are elided in terms of feminine self-sacrifice and wifely duty.

Yet, Jane Loudon and Mrs. Beeton used traditional feminine roles to extend their influence in ways that obscure their contribution to British culture and their fashioning of a more active, feminine subjectivity. The critical enclosures above indicate the pervasiveness of an ideology of separate spheres. Despite recent criticism's deconstructions of this dyad, accounts of the Loudons tend to reinscribe the very split that the couple's landscaping and inscaping enterprise undermines in their cultivation of a gardenesque aesthetic for the middle classes. These portrayals show that critics tend to take Jane Loudon too much at her word when she claims that she is an amateur in the subjects she writes about.

Like so many other nineteenth-century women writers, Jane wrote to make money and to support herself in an accepted, respectable profession for women. Yet, as a professional woman, she had to negotiate the codes that defined public and private spheres. During their marriage as well as after her husband's death, she introduces several of her books and essays in terms of her wifely duty to her husband, portraying herself as a woman who entered matrimony completely ignorant of botany, horticulture, and natural history, who had to learn fast and observe continually. In the introduction to her path-breaking *Gardening for Ladies*, Jane Loudon emphasizes her ignorance and her husband's "anxious" desire to teach her about horticulture early in their marriage: "it is

scarcely possible to imagine any person more completely ignorant than I was, of everything relating to plants and gardening...."<sup>29</sup>

Paradoxically, and perhaps rather strategically, Loudon argues that her position as a beginner makes her particularly qualified to translate the specialized knowledge of botany and horticulture into practical terms for her female readers: "thus, though it may at first sight appear presumptuous in me to teach an art of which for three-fourths of my life I was perfectly ignorant, it is in fact that very circumstance which is one of my chief qualifications for the task."<sup>30</sup> Hence, we must look beyond her fashioning of herself as a proper woman to appreciate her delicate negotiations of the codes of public and private spheres. Loudon calling herself "an amateur" allows her to enter the profession of gardening and landscaping in the legitimating context of middle-class women's wifely duty, in which her self-deprecation and feminine humility become the required armor for her profession.

Indeed, to return to the semantic grounds of this study, Jane must inscape rather than landscape in her approach to the field of home and garden aesthetics because of her more tenuous relationship to the public sphere. Despite her claims of ignorance in her introduction, Jane Loudon nevertheless confidently extends the domestic space to the garden and appropriates it as a site for woman's self-cultivation. While considered traditionally feminine, Jane Webb Loudon's *The Country Companion, or How to Enjoy a Country Life Rationally* (1845) and books such as *Gardening for Ladies* (1840), as well as a range of instructive works for children on gardening and the natural sciences, are as extensive in ideological reach as her husband's detailed management of exterior landscape and architectural spaces. As her writing illustrates at length, the garden

becomes a feminine space demanding direct managerial control, creativity, and physical labor, as well as access to and mobility within the metropolis for its successful and sustained cultivation.

In the sole biography of Jane Loudon, *Lady with Green Fingers* (1965), Bea Howe has praised the Victorian writer's refreshingly anti-sentimental approach to the garden and her resistance to "flowery conventions." According to Howe, "For a bouquet she substituted a good old-fashioned spade and taught a lady to dig professionally" and discreetly avoided "the indiscriminate orgy of sentimental flower painting which took place among ladies in the nineteenth-century home as well as out-of-doors."<sup>31</sup> While Howe appreciates Jane Loudon's distinctive taste in gardening, she does not explore the class implications of this Victorian woman's practical, rational approach to the garden and landscape. In direct contrast with sentimental or picturesque displays of women's femininity figured in the passive holding of a bouquet or the rural sketch, Jane Loudon encouraged women to actively enter the garden, a space often worked by under-gardeners or overseen by the husband. By appropriating the suburban or smaller domestic garden as a space for self-cultivation, the middle-class woman is distinctly anti-picturesque in both status and orientation; rather, she constructs an image of the practical domestic woman to counter the artificial femininity associated with aristocratic women as well as to foster a managerial or tutelary relationship to working-class women and their homes.

Jane Loudon's practical, rational appropriation of the English garden and landscape is outlined in *The Ladies' Country Companion, or How to Enjoy a Country Life Rationally* (1845).<sup>32</sup> Loudon's narrator for the *Companion* insists that the mistress learn to appreciate the virtues of a quiet rural life, an appreciation that requires the

development of practical household skills as well as a course of self-improvement that uses the local countryside to study botany and natural history. A mature woman experienced in household management, the narrator writes a series of letters to Annie, a young woman who has recently married and left a pleasurable social life in town to move into her husband's comparatively secluded country house. Of course, before encouraging a feminine journey of self-enlightenment, Annie's mentor must provide the new bride with guidelines for household management. After instructing Annie in the best way to build and maintain a fire, the narrator's next objective is to dispel the house's gloominess, to improve the circulation of light and air by removing the trees that both bride and narrator agree crowd the house and limit its prospect.

The following extract demonstrates the politics of her inscaping, the use of land, laborers, and patriarchal relations to revise social spaces and relationships from within the home to the benefit of its mistress' view. Replying to a letter from Annie who is worried about the impact of her landscaping on her husband, the narrator defends the changes she has encouraged:

You say you felt excessively pained when your husband said, that, though he did not think any circumstances could ever have induced him to order those trees to be cut down, he was delighted to have such an opportunity of pleasing you; and that, when you heard the workmen employed in cutting the trees down the following morning, you felt every blow they struck, and you thought he must hate you for wishing him to make such a sacrifice. These feelings are quite natural, but, in my opinion, the readiness with which your husband complied with your wishes will strengthen the bond of affection between you rather than weaken it, as there cannot possibly be a stronger proof of love than is shown in sacrificing our own prejudices in favour of the beloved object. (14-15)

As this passage suggests, the marriage itself becomes a set of relations that can be deployed in potentially enabling ways. The woman, "the beloved object" embowered in the country estate, is able, nevertheless, to use feminine discourses of love, sympathy,

and domestic health to manage masculine spaces and traditional uses of rural land and laborers. In an interesting gendered reversal, the husband's emotional attachment to the trees that for him symbolize the family's history gives way to the wife's legitimated desire to improve the sanitary condition of the house ("without a constant change of air there can be neither health nor happiness") as well as the view from her appointed location within the domestic sphere (13). This assertion of household power is exemplified by the narrator's suggestion that the "gloomy scotch pines" which oppressed Annie "with their shade," will make ideal fuel for the warming of the house: "they may be useful in this respect, as producing an article of domestic economy" (12).

Of course, this revisionary inscaping must be expressed in appropriate feminine codes of sympathy and feeling; the wife's improvements are tempered by the pain of "every blow." She feels with the destruction of each ancestral tree a pain akin to an amputation. In addition, she hears rather than oversees the trees' removal, an emphasis on alternate physical senses that displaces the masculine subject's prerogative of sight and, instead, emphasizes the mistress' emotional depth and imaginative sympathy. In contrast, the husband's feelings are represented as irrational; without the coaxing of his wife, the narrator suggests, he would allow prejudices to cloud his judgement and inhibit the improvement of the estate. By stressing the need for light and air as well as prospect, the narrator's interior point-of-view opens up the domestic space as the primary frame for the rural landscape, thus staking a claim to the patriarchal framework of marriage and a masculine landscape tradition.

Thus, while Alice maintains what Anne Bermingham has defined as a proprietary vision, it is one that destabilizes in Laura Mulvey's term, "the male gaze," and employs



alternate, feminized senses such as sympathy, the hallmark of the Victorian lady.<sup>33</sup> By emphasizing health and domestic happiness, however, the narrator's sympathetic improvements are represented as rational, natural impulses grounded in contemporary beliefs about the "science" of healthy homes. However, the mistress' appropriation of space, her politics of inscaping, are a necessary response to her own displacement, her dutiful move from her own home and more sophisticated, varied way of life in a large town to that of her husband's quiet, comparatively isolated country house.

Indeed, Loudon addresses the psychological necessity of inscaping, of reshaping one's perception of the rural from a feminine, interiorized position. She emphasizes this necessity at the book's beginning when the narrator comforts Annie with a formula for "happiness" in the country based on self-control and reliance:

Have you ever looked at a landscape through a coloured glass, and remarked the cold and miserable appearance presented through the purple pane, contrasted with the rich glow thrown upon every object by the orange glass? Both give a false idea of reality; but the impressions thus received are not more erroneous than those we often experience of what passes around us, when viewed through the medium of our own feelings. Happiness, I suspect, in most cases depends upon ourselves more than we are generally willing to allow . . . (6-7)

But this emphasis on the development of self-reliance is also used, at least fictionally, to effect concrete changes to the estate and the relationship between the house and the landscape. For example, she replaces her husband's trees, the remains of an older ideology of landscape emphasizing rural retreat and male privacy, with a flower garden, a visual signifier of feminine influence and presence.

The narrator's supervision of Annie's planning and cultivation of a garden reveals the harnessing of women's position within the domestic sphere as the grounds for colonizing the surrounding exterior. In the following passage, the mentor's insistence on a "a locale" for landscaping gives her directions for Annie an unusual urgency:

I should like to have those gloomy firs, cleared away, which I see close to your house in your sketches, and your flower-garden so placed that you could step into it at once from the windows of your usual sitting-room... as I must have a *locale* to make my description understood, I will proceed to give you some hints as to the laying out and planting of a garden as I should like you to have in the warm and sheltered corner under the southern window of your morning room... Supposing the Scotch pines and cedars to have been cut down, their roots to have been grubbed up, and the ground to have been dug over and levelled, the next thing is to determine upon the plan for the garden. I think it should certainly be a regular geometric figure, and planted in masses, each bed containing flowers of one kind, so as to produce something of the effect of a Turkey carpet when looked down upon from the windows of the house. (155-156)

Thus, Loudon advocates landscaping and gardening as women's work and areas of interest, in which maintenance of the pleasurable aesthetic requires perpetual attention and supervision as well as a kind of sanctioned violence—for the shelter and warmth of the morning room requires the grounds to be “grubbed up,” “dug over” and “levelled.” In addition, she frames these alterations as extensions of the domestic sphere and its interior comforts, in which the garden is to achieve “the effect of a Turkey carpet.”

Of course, Loudon's purpose is to improve the mistress' view from the morning room; thus, she revises landscape from the orientation of the domestic sphere, an appropriation that must make us question the extent to which landscape, as Wendy Joy Darby has written, “has been a male domain.”<sup>34</sup> Strategically, no external spaces exist in Jane's text: the seemingly ever-expanding rings of domestic expertise that the Companion details envelop the surrounding landscape gradually and discreetly. Finally, Loudon's feminine landscaping privileges the fluidity between sitting-room and the garden. In a later passage, for example, the narrator insists that the flower beds under the windows have gravel walks that will allow the mistress to move easily from house to garden, making her supervision of both more accessible and more fluid.

Ultimately, Loudon's revisioning of the landscape effectively shifts the conventional orientation of the feminine domain and household economy (intended to safeguard and contain the integrity of the home) towards the external landscape, bringing it within the bounds of her own expertise and appropriating it for self-cultivation. By making the initial focus an interior one, the narrator prioritizes the mistress' domestic relationship to the landscape. With this reorientation of woman, house, and landscape, Annie is invested with the authority necessary to manage the interior of the household, the careful divisions of labor and space, from parlour to larder. By establishing herself as the manager of the household, whose eyes and ears are constantly alert to its inner workings and who performs the organizational and practical labour of the housekeeper as well as mistress, she is also able to situate the house as the frame for the exterior landscape—one comprised of gardens and parks as well as cottages and their inhabitants. Thus, the expanded view from the sitting-room affords woman mobility and a sense of the malleability of space, dispelling the "gloom" and experience of domestic enclosure by opening up the view according to a new, feminized set of coordinates.

Furthermore, in Loudon's framework, the feminine appropriation of landscape affords the "cultivated" and self-cultivating woman greater freedom of literal movement, for walking, gardening, animal husbandry, and, eventually, social intervention in the form of local philanthropy and cottage visiting. However, her use of landscape is anti-picturesque in orientation, a revision of the Wordsworthian Romantic relationship to Nature that emphasizes practical and rational pursuits in the outdoors. The *Companion's* narrator, after taking care of domestic business, urges her protégé to leave her usual "domain" and "develop a love for the countryside," equipping her with good, sturdy

boots, "German boots made to tie round the ankles," rather than the conventional sketchbook or sentimental bouquet (392).

While John declares the garden a site of "endless variety," for the male proprietor of a modest suburban residence, the countryside becomes an infinite space for exploration for the woman of taste. While Jane Loudon begins this section of the *Companion* with a Romantic ode to Nature from Goethe to urge Annie to "Seek nature" and "leave [her] trim flower-garden, and [her] tame poultry," she quickly shifts to instructing her protégé on the natural laws of ecology and the environment, encouraging Annie to derive pleasure not from an existential communion with nature but from the practical uses of landscape for her self-education (391).

Of course, Annie's interest in natural science is presented not as an individualistic pursuit but as a means for improving marriage and making her a better woman. In addition to cultivating the taste necessary to produce an aesthetic environment for the home, inside and out, she must also demonstrate a knowledge of the flora and fauna of her particular geographical locale, which becomes a mental map for participating in the more explicitly political and commercial domains of imperial expansion. In the chapter on "Rural Walks," the narrator instructs Annie that admiring the scenery is insufficient: "You must make sources of interest to yourself by observing the various natural objects you meet with, and when you come home endeavoring to make yourself acquainted with some particulars respecting them" (394). Loudon's narrator then walks her through several close examinations of the local wildlife while referring to specific encyclopedias that will illumine each local specimen's scientific origin and classification. Natural history, botany, and horticulture become means for exhibiting the middle-class woman's

national significance, her Englishness, and her active awareness of a connection to a national geography distinguished by specific species and ecologies in the local countryside.

Jane Loudon also emphasizes the usefulness of landscape and the countryside for women's self-cultivation in her children's literature.<sup>35</sup> Written as conversations between mother and daughter, in which the father is a rather forbidding but marginal presence, these travel narratives show mother and daughter taking rail trips and ferries to London's local countryside, the Continent, and the Isle of Wight, family excursions which provide numerous occasions for objectively observing landscape and culture as well as the habits of fellow travellers. These narratives repeatedly emphasize the middle-class woman's practical use of the countryside, in which leisure is marked as instructive and productive rather than superficial or self-indulgent. Thus, implicit in these representations is a critique of an aristocratic abandonment of the landscape or misuse of it for superficial pleasure or sport.

To return to Loudon's *Companion*, while the outdoors serves as an endless site for self-education, the surrounding countryside is also a peopled landscape in need of supervision and reform. Thus, in Loudon's concluding section, "Country Duties," the narrator instructs Annie in ways to successfully use her expertise to improve the lives of the local cottagers through the instruction of their daughters in cooking, cleaning, and sewing, as well as the establishment of schools. This section explains the delicate business of cottage visiting, especially ways to soften and elide its intrusive nature by properly managing proximity and distance between mistress and the cottagers. Thus, just as John Loudon advocates a landscape aesthetic that advertises a proprietor who values

both individual privacy and civic responsibility, Jane Loudon's domestic heroine exerts her influence in feminine ways that mask these acts as forms of social control. Loudon's *Companion*, ultimately, is a hybrid text, part epistolary novel, conduct book, and detailed manual on household management, animal husbandry, gardening, and cottage visiting, that reappropriates the ideological goal of landscape aesthetics that her husband's work exemplifies: to harmonize class differences through the tasteful management of domestic spaces, indoors and out.

While *The Companion* focuses on the mistress' role in landscaping the country house and its environs, Jane Loudon's more generally cultivated a feminine landscape aesthetic for the use of middle-class women like herself who lived in the city or its suburbs. Jane Loudon, like many women of her class, were expected to cultivate a home while moving between country, suburb, and city to procure its resources (in Jane's case, the proliferation of plant nurseries in London, which John believed to be the best in the world) all the more rapidly and efficiently. Therefore taste for the home and garden functions as a vehicle for middle-class women's mobility in urban space. Women's expertise in the arts of domesticity is used to legitimate not just the practical need to run domestic errands in public, urban space, but also means for justifying their enjoyment of the city and its expanding attractions—from floral fetes hosted by the Royal Botanical Society, the zoo, to museums and the fashionable panoramas illustrating the history and cultural differences of foreign countries and colonial territories. Last but not least, as her children's literature attests, taste establishes women as *interested* travelers, eager to share the knowledge and energy of modernity with husband and children.

In addition to providing justification for new forms of mobility, Jane Loudon's theory of women's gardenesque taste becomes a buffer against economic uncertainty and a means to define herself in relation to working-class women. The fine line many middle-class women tread as legal and economic dependents makes taste and the dual emphasis on self-reliance and cultivation all the more crucial—the means of propping up and maintaining a sense of feminine respectability and identity in the face of financial vulnerability and limited avenues for economic support.

This anxiety is evident in Jane Loudon's revised edition of her husband's *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion* after his death. In the original 1838 edition, John advocated women's participation in landscape aesthetics by arguing that the art could be achieved by any woman accomplished in the feminine business of hat and dress-making: "We venture to assert that there is not a mantuamaker or milliner, who understands her business, that might not, in a few hours, be taught to design flower gardens with as much skill and taste as a professional landscape gardener."<sup>36</sup> In contrast, Mrs. Loudon's 1850 revision takes on a much more genteel tone, rejecting the working-class or commercial taint of the milliner for the woman of leisure's domestic pursuit: "We venture to assert that there is not any lady who can design a pattern, and embroider a gown, that might not in a few hours . . ."<sup>37</sup> Jane Loudon's revision underscores the ideological stakes of carving out a theory of taste that would consolidate middle-class women's identity over and against the less genteel or working-class women.

If the professional middle-class man has replaced the aristocrat as the most able landscaper, capable of transforming the smallest residence and garden into the "beau ideal" of modern life and harmoniously blending country and city, then so too must the

middle-class woman demonstrate a similar virtuosity indoors. During her six months as editor for *The Ladies Companion at Home and Abroad* from December 29, 1849 to June 22, 1850, Jane Loudon wrote a regular column entitled "On the Influence of Female Taste," a detailed theory of taste specifically designed to enable the middle-class woman to incorporate the pleasures of landscape for more scaled-down spaces. Jane Loudon's first editorial for the magazine stresses her commitment to the domestic, which, like her own published *Companion*, was "intended to be a Ladies' Companion in the fullest sense of the word:--in the drawing-room; in the study; in the dressing-room; in the housekeeper's room; and in the garden."<sup>38</sup> The magazine's emphasis on "the necessity of mental cultivation" justified this need by assuring its readers that it did not intend that women "usurp men," but, rather, that they become "rational and intelligent beings" fit for male companionship.<sup>39</sup>

Despite these claims, however, Loudon insists on women's superiority in matters of taste. In her first column "On the Influence of Female Taste," she acknowledges men's general superiority while carving out a niche in which "a cultivated taste" distinguishes an elegant woman in the same way that a classical education marks the gentleman:

Men may be, and probably are, superior to women in all that requires profound thought and general knowledge; but in the arrangement of the house, and the introduction of ornamental furniture and articles of bijouterie, there can be no doubt of the innate superiority of women. Every one must have remarked the difference in the furnishing of a bachelor's house and one where a lady presides; the thousand little elegancies of the latter, though nothing in themselves, adding like ciphers, prodigiously to the value of the solid articles they are appended to.<sup>40</sup>

If landscape principles emphasize the ability to define a space, to distinguish it as one's own while taking into account its commercial or use value as well as aesthetic effect, the woman's innate superiority in taste performs the parallel function of marking the interior of the house's as well as its inhabitants' value, particularly its designer's. It is the middle-



class woman's ability to select and arrange household objects that makes it a home. Indeed, the apex of taste for Loudon is the ability to make everyday objects, not meant to be or considered aesthetic or ornamental in their own right, into something beautiful: "It is in the adaptation of articles, not ornamental in themselves, to the purposes of ornament, that female taste is displayed most conspicuously . . . ." <sup>41</sup> While the picturesque was an outdoor aesthetic enjoyed primarily by a male elite, here woman's innate gardenesque taste combines the elements of Nature, space, and color for the enhancement of the domestic sphere.

Jane Loudon's emphasis on the principles of beauty, utility, and fitness assumes the abstract nature of taste, conferring a kind of cultural cache on those who are able arrange and manage spaces and things in ways that exceed their market value. The aesthetic of home provides a kind of spatial harmony that will affect those who live there and enjoy its comforts, in which harmony is the product of the individual woman's vision as well as her hands. Finally, she incorporates the feminine discourse of memory and affection as yet another source of value that exceeds the materiality of the household. For example, a boudoir that joins "the substance of a temporary nature, like needlework, in solid articles of furniture, would be in bad taste,' unless it is "a memorial of her sisters, or the companions of her youthful days" (69). While the gentleman's fondness for the estate's old trees, and their association with the family and time is devalued in Loudon's *Country Companion*, her magazine column defends the woman's attachment to objects that hold memories, particularly ones that recall women relatives. Like the woman's tasteful vision and arrangement, memory and kinship invest the otherwise unexceptional, or the "trifle," with aesthetic as well as sentimental value.

Her column on taste also emphasizes feminine ways to bring in the view, often through principles of taste that distill rural images or qualities for enhancing domestic space. In a short piece on window and balcony gardens, she advocates bringing the garden into the living room, believing that “people in general enjoy plants more in their living-rooms than in any other place” (47). While the classic eighteenth-century country house architecture included a gallery that anchored ownership in images of landscape, the middle-class household attempts to incorporate Nature in a variety of scaled-down, often ingenious ways, from candleholders shaped like flowers, to fabrics and furniture imprinted with rural motifs, to the popular keepsake, to sketches and etchings, to the more elaborate plant cabinet and mini-green house, as well as in the everyday activities intended to improve one’s home, including the maintenance of a prosperous garden, which, as Jane Loudon’s *Gardening for Ladies* exemplifies, extended the domestic sphere outwards both physically and ideologically through the increasingly assiduous management of leisure time and space.

While conceding men’s superiority in general fields of knowledge, she nevertheless employs abstract principles, showing that it is possible to “generalize” and distill laws for the seemingly marginal field of home décor. She emphasizes the skillful combination of the “natural” with abstract qualities of beauty—graceful outlines, variation, harmony, etc., in terms of congruity and incongruity. In each essay of the series she uses a number of illustrated examples of candleholders, cabinets and upholstery, and furniture for the garden, beginning with the object that fails to meet the standards of taste, and then proceeding to the next example which usually fulfills some but not all of the principles, and ending finally with the exemplary. Very concerned with the negative connotations of

incongruity, the mixing of unlike things, the tasteful woman avoids the “profane” conflation of the real with the artificial object. For example, she is horrified by the confusion of real flowers with its household facsimile: “What can be more incongruous, I may ask, than to find a bouquet of flowers thrust into another flower; or to fancy a candle fixed in a real convolvulus? What a profanation of flowers, the loveliest of God’s gifts to man!”<sup>42</sup>

Her emphasis on congruity and incongruity becomes the means for negotiating women’s economic vulnerability, their segregation from the legal world of inheritance and profitable professions. Her inscaping of the home through the “cultivation of female taste” assumes a type of female subjectivity capable of responding productively to economic uncertainty or a shoestring budget (19). The emphasis on restraint and use in the art of managing the household also distinguishes its owner from the nouveau-riche, in which “a room may be full of expensive furniture, and yet look only like an upholsterer’s warehouse; and it may be furnished with the simplest materials, and yet have an air of elegance and refinement” (19). Loudon’s treatise on female taste suggests that the woman with a “magic hand” can make her household elide the presence of commerce and the market place on which it depends (19). While serving as a form of feminine capital, the emphasis on principles also provides a potential defense (at least imaginatively) against the economic precariousness of women’s lives, which the *Companion* and its editor’s calls for aid for middle-class and genteel women-in-need consistently remind the reader. Her contributions to the *Ladies Companion* also show the psychological toll that domestic duties exact and how difficult it is to achieve household harmony. She also acknowledges middle-class women’s economic vulnerability, and the consequent value

of their unpaid labor in their families' households, in which "few families are there who have not a kind aunt or sister belonging to them, whose loss would be as severely felt as those of the legitimate heads of the house" (8).

In order to overcome these anxieties, Jane Loudon's work fuses landscape principles with the architectural orientation of the household itself, in which the external world is contained, managed, and even literally framed by domestic space and interests. As in her *Companion*, the perspective is feminized in ways that enable women to shape the landscape from within interior spaces. Responding to a nasty letter claiming that "taste need only be cultivated by the rich," Loudon provides the following description of an officer's widow, a genteel woman of reduced means, whose "art of management" transforms a "miserable abode" into a comfortable home:

The floor of the sitting room was sanded, the chairs and tables were of plain deal, and the window was without blind or curtain of any kind and looked out on a dusty road. Nothing could be more unpromising than the whole and it really seemed as if nothing could be done to improve it. The widow, however, was not discouraged. She had only a few shillings at her command, but she had luckily a piece of green baize that had formed a cover to some things she had brought with her; and this she joined together, so as to form a substitute for a carpet, which she laid on the floor...for the window she made a curtain of coarse white muslin, lined with pink glazed calico; and on the outside she planted a nasturtium and a major convulvulus or two, which, as she watered them every morning with soap suds in which she had washed herself, grew luxuriantly, and being carefully trained, soon made a kind of framework of leaves round the window, which had a very pretty effect when seen from the room. She sowed a few annual flowers in the little garden behind the house, and a few of these gathered occasionally, and arranged tastefully on plates with water, or a little wet sand, were placed on the table. Thus, at the expense of a few shillings, and a little female industry tastefully directed, a miserable abode was changed into one that looked perfectly enviable, and that invariably called forth exclamations of admiration when seen for the first time. (57)

In this depiction of the widower's domestic virtuosity, "a little female industry tastefully directed" the external is framed from within, making the landscape an object to be appropriated and manufactured through domestic labor. The outdoors, the dusty road

which suggests the margins of a starker industrialized landscape, is displaced, becoming the carefully framed background for a home and garden that has distilled nature's beauty and authenticity, the freedom it connotes within what is otherwise a very cramped space. The window becomes the means for producing the picturesque indoors and distancing the home from a barren or hostile outdoors. Finally, while this account reflects the class prejudice, the belief that proper management can magically produce comfort when material resources are scarce or nonexistent, it also reflects an anxiety that women of the lower middle and middle-classes share—the desire to work the same kind of magic under similar circumstances.

The Loudons' publications contributed numerous examples of a rural aesthetic tradition intended for middle-class consumption within the home, celebrating the sense of freedom that domestic privacy could afford in a rural or suburban location, thus participating in diverse ways in the nineteenth-century intensification of the private domain. Their many encyclopedias and long-running journals on landscape architecture, natural history, botany, and gardening popularized these pursuits for a hungry middle-class audience, men and women alike. Providing solace and satisfaction in matters of home and garden, often functioning as multi-purpose conduct books providing lessons on how to be genteel, their work celebrates a utopian space that the middle class could, at least within certain imagined and material limits, control. As Marxist critics Raymond Williams and Ann Bermingham, have detailed, industrialization and an expanding capitalist economy worked to alienate many people from the country and rural traditions; this displacement, in turn, created a nostalgic longing for a simpler, healthy life associated with rural contexts and the countryside, a gap filled by the comforting image

of the ivy-covered cottage and neatly arranged flower beds and garden that reflect and sustain a productive, self-sufficient family.

Their embrace of domestic beautification, however, rather than just a nostalgic attempt to close themselves off from a corrupt, modern world, exemplifies the fluidity of nineteenth-century perceptions of interior, private space and public spaces of work and improvement, as well as a realization of the interdependence of rural and urban, town and country. Indeed, the metropolis plays an essential, yet shifting and ambiguous role in their ideology. While John Loudon's syringe sketch posits the city as an exhausting, vaguely dangerous place, many of their publications also posit the metropolis as the center of gardening knowledge, the place where the best nurseries are clustered, and the site for the newest horticultural developments are available for the creation of the ideal home life. Indeed, the city provides opportunities for cultivating what are often figured as domestic pursuits—from gardening, to education, to self-improvement. Their companionate works complement and expand notions of domestic space through principles of landscape management and husbandry that function as models for middle-class professionalism and expertise.

While often envisioned as an autonomous, peaceful space, the gardenesque home becomes an enterprise at once commercial and social, the subject for volumes of 19<sup>th</sup> century print in literary publications and practical periodicals alike, and a springboard for ideological expression that extends to the more overtly political and public issues of the day—from the Condition of England question, to public health and sanitary reform, to the status of seamstresses and governesses and under gardeners.<sup>43</sup> Finally, their respective works such as *The Gardening Magazine* and *Gardening for Ladies* illuminate how the

management of spaces, from the estate to the cottage, from public parks to servants' closets, the suburban villa to working men's housing in industrial towns, was increasingly overseen by a professional middle class whose authority, in part, rested in the vocabulary and pursuit of landscape principles and aesthetics—now appropriated for the goals of domestic ideology.

In the midst of broad economic and social changes, the Victorian middle classes increasingly figure the leisure activities associated with the domestic sphere as the means for national improvement and social regeneration, but these are activities dependent upon the cultural caché of rural imagery and aesthetics, traditionally an elite male discourse and field of expertise. However, with the gradual erosion of the eighteenth-century gentleman's proprietary vision and the tradition of landscape that it engendered, shifts in social and economic power enable the middle classes to forge their own relationship to landscape—a relationship constituted by and defined through the cultivation of the private domestic sphere and its associated values of familial duty, the virtues of industry and thrift, taste, order, and Christian morality. This cultural appropriation reaches its apotheosis in the Loudons' cultivation of a home and garden aesthetic and articulation of its pleasures.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Johnson, *The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815-1830*, New York: Harper Perennial, 1991, p 283, and Melanie Louise Simo, *Loudon and the Landscape: From Country Seat to Metropolis 1783-1843*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Bea Howe. *Lady with Green Fingers*, London: Country Life Limited, 1961, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995, 9.

<sup>5</sup> John C. Loudon, Preface to *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion*, London: H Bohn, 1838.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of Taste*, Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.

<sup>7</sup> John Loudon, *The Suburban Gardener*, 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> John Loudon, *The Suburban Gardener*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> The suburban garden's potential abundance also takes on a national, even imperial role in John Loudon's ideal of the suburban garden: "The number of plants and especially of trees which can be cultivated in a suburban garden at one time is necessarily circumscribed, but, if a suburban amateur chose to limit the period during which he cultivated each tree or plant to the time of flowering with him for the first time, he might, in the course of a few years, . . . have had growing in it all the plants in cultivation in the open air in Britain," *The Suburban Gardener*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> See H.L. Malchow, "Public Gardens and Social Action in Late Victorian London" *Victorian Studies*, 29 (1985): 97-104, and Martin Gaskell, "Gardens for the Working Class: Victorian Practical Pleasure," *Victorian Studies*, 23 (1980): 479-501.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*, New York, Basic Books, Inc, 1987, 89-96, and Paul Johnson. *The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815-1830*, 282-283. Fishman sees John Loudon's career and influence as a negative, conservative force encouraging suburban retreat from modern life and social ills of poverty, disease, and class conflict conflated with the city. Paul Johnson, while more positive, portrays Loudon as primarily a thinker whose promotion of cult of gardens "was one way of protesting against the modern world, and a contributor to "the defenses which needed to be erected against the destructive force of the modern world" (283).

<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Taylor, *Some Nineteenth-Century Gardeners*, London: Skeffington, 1951, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, 56, 60.

<sup>14</sup> John Loudon, *The Suburban Gardener*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, 7. Causes of this erosion of public and private have been attributed to the rise of an urban culture and the proliferation of print in the nineteenth century, an industry of knowledge disseminated



through conduct books, newspapers, and innumerable journals whose flexible, varied content and readership often blur the distinctions between popular and elite or specialized audiences.

<sup>16</sup> Chase and Levenson's analysis of Robert Kerr's house richly exemplifies how space is gendered within the ideal household as well as the ideological or "polemical" weapons it provides for class identity and differentiation. In particular, the authors identify how "comfort" signals a form of intimacy and privacy only accessible to the upper classes, in which "Comfort, that is, becomes a polemical weapon with which to defend the preeminence of Victorian domesticity. The comparative modesty of the Victorian home, its sobriety, its managed intimacy, becomes a mark of distinction. Economy, not extravagance; modesty, not grandeur; comfort, not luxury—these are the measures of architectural maturity," *The Spectacle of Intimacy*, 160.

<sup>17</sup> Marie Louise Simo, *Loudon and the Landscape: From Country Seat to Metropolis 1783-1843*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988, xxiv.

<sup>18</sup> John Loudon, *The Architectural Magazine*, 7, no. 1 (1831), 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> John Loudon, *An Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture*, London: Longman, 1833, 1.

<sup>20</sup> John Loudon, *An Encyclopedia*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> John Loudon's emphasis on the reciprocal nature of domestic health and "culture" also reflects how nineteenth-century England's poor laws, social reforms, and public health initiatives were fueled by a middle-class Victorian ideal of domesticity, in which the physical or architectural integrity of the home, cleanliness, and order inside and outside reflected one's moral status, and one's household became a metonym for physical as well as social health and integrity. As an American observer of New England towns claims, "Uncouth, mean, ragged dirty houses, constituting the body of any town, will regularly be accompanied by coarse, grovelling manners" (3).

<sup>22</sup> John Loudon, *An Encyclopedia*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> John Loudon, *An Encyclopedia*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> John Loudon, *An Encyclopedia*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> John Loudon, "General Results of a Gardening Tour," *The Gardener's Magazine*, 8 (June 1838): 264-65.

<sup>26</sup> John Loudon believed that though the state of architecture was sorely in need of improvement, he attributes its limited advances to the middle classes and its capitalist enterprising and varied domestic habits: "by the interchange of the productions of one

country for those of another; and improvements in manufacture" as well as "an infinity of other domestic ameliorations," *The Architectural Magazine*, 1 (1834): 2.

<sup>27</sup> Jane Loudon, "The Suburban Garden," *The Ladies Companion at Home and Abroad*, 6 (February 2, 1850), 81.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Johnson. *The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815-1830*, 283.

<sup>29</sup> Jane Loudon, *Gardening for Ladies*, London: John Murray, 1840, xi.

<sup>30</sup> Jane Loudon, *Gardening for Ladies*, London: John Murray, 1840, xi.

<sup>31</sup> Howe, *Lady with Green Fingers*, 10.

<sup>32</sup> All following in-text references will be from Jane Loudon, *The Lady's Country Companion; or, How to Enjoy a Country Life Rationally*, London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867.

<sup>33</sup> Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16 (1975): 6-18.

<sup>34</sup> Wendy Joy Darby. *Landscape and Identity: Geographies of Nation and Class in England*. New York: Berg, 2000, 2.

<sup>35</sup> See Jane Loudon's *The Young Naturalist's Journey or The Travels of Agnes Merton with her Mama*, S. Routledge, 1840; *Agnes: The Little Girl Who Kept her Promise*, Harvey, 1839; and *Glimpses of Nature During a Visit to the Isle of Wight*, Griffith, 1843. Loudon's daughter Agnes was the model for her child protagonist, furthering her blending of feminine commitment to family and professional pursuits.

<sup>36</sup> John Loudon, *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion*, 1838, 6-7.

<sup>37</sup> Jane Loudon, Introduction to *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion*, by John Loudon, 1850, 6.

<sup>38</sup> Jane Loudon, *The Ladies Companion at Home and Abroad*, No. 1, December 29, 1849, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Jane Loudon, *The Ladies Companion at Home and Abroad*, No. 1, December 29, 1849, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Jane Loudon, *The Ladies Companion at Home and Abroad*, No. 2, January 5, 1850, 19.

<sup>41</sup> Jane Loudon, *The Ladies Companion at Home and Abroad*, No. 2, January 5, 1850, 19.

<sup>42</sup> Jane Loudon, *The Ladies Companion at Home and Abroad*, No. 3, January 12, 1850, 46. All in-text citations that follow are from this number of the *Companion*.

<sup>43</sup> As editor of *The Ladies Companion*, Jane Loudon denounced the poor living conditions of seamstresses, going as far as to suggest disposing of the middlemen and building large, bright, comfortable rooms for workers where “ladies” could solicit their work directly. For John Loudon, *The Gardener's Magazine* provided a forum for advocating improved wages, educational opportunities, and better living conditions for gardeners. In addition, he consistently published letters and essays from working-class writers, many of whom had never ventured to publish before.

CHAPTER 4  
ELIZABETH GASKELL'S WIVES AND DAUGHTERS (1865): LADY GARDENERS  
AND THE CULTIVATION OF THE SOCIAL IN BRITISH LITERATURE

A friend of the Loudons who visited them often at their own carefully landscaped home in the London suburbs of Bayswater, Elizabeth Gaskell had first-hand experience of the couple's gardenesque aesthetic, their use of gardening and the discourse of landscape in the creation of a healthy, productive home life. A woman who loved gardening herself, Gaskell shared with Jane Loudon a preference for the smaller domestic garden, which allowed both women writers a space to articulate a middle-class feminine approach to the sciences and an expanding capitalist economy by making these epistemologies and movements relevant to the domestic sphere and women's concerns. However, while Jane Loudon reenvisioned the country estate in terms of middle-class women's interests in household health, productivity, as well as its uses for self-cultivation, Gaskell is more critical of aristocratic women's use of landscape as frivolous and unproductive in her gardenesque novel, *Wives and Daughters* (1866).<sup>1</sup>

A novelist deeply affected by the urban suffering and poverty that she witnessed first-hand as the wife of a Unitarian minister in Manchester, Gaskell is sensitive to the connections between landscape and class conflict, in which an aristocratic landscape aesthetic sustained by a history of enclosure and displacement of the rural population marked the upper classes' lack of sympathy for the working classes and their inability to manage social relations. Engaging in a critique of class relations as pointed as her industrial novels, Gaskell's use of landscape and gardening in *Wives and Daughters*

establishes these fields as feminine domains, ones for which aristocratic and middle-class women provide competing modes and approaches.

Drawing a contrast between an aristocratic misuse of land represented by the Cumnor women's self-serving landscape practices, Gaskell makes the smaller town garden a site for her heroine, Molly, the daughter of a doctor, to exhibit her superior ability to smoothly manage space and social relations. While the narrative initially shows Molly's preference for seemingly wild or uncultivated landscape, her early unmediated relationship to landscape is gradually discarded. Gaskell suggests in the trajectory of the protagonist's development that Molly must learn to appreciate landscape in more socially constructive ways, to understand them as productive extensions to domestic life rather than opportunities for escape from its conflicts.

Ultimately, Molly's ability to make the most of her more modest town garden also suggests that she has the feeling and intellect to marry beyond her station and assume a place in the English country estate as Roger Hamley's wife. At the Hamley estate, Roger introduces Molly to the natural sciences as a means to distract her from her own domestic troubles (her father has sent her there to provide companionship to the ailing Mrs. Hamley and to remove her from the romantic advances of a medical student). Yet the heroine's interests are both genuine and motivated by affection, allowing Molly access to British imperial discourse through Roger's letters when he is sent to Africa to pursue his scientific interests. Molly participates sympathetically in his geographical work, carefully studying maps to appreciate his progress and reading to keep up with his interests in geography and natural history. The novel's rural setting is not used just to extend or celebrate middle-class tastes for rural and domestic forms of leisure like

gardening and botany; rather, Gaskell participates in and extends the British tradition of landscape aesthetics, echoing and reinforcing women's stewardship of landscape as a means for managing class relations at home.

Yet, Gaskell's successful naturalization of the domestic garden as appropriately middle-class and feminine has elided the social force of her gardenesque aesthetic, her use of it as a means to participate in nation-building and the consolidation of class identity. While recent critics like Deirdre D'Albertis, Pam Morris, and Hilary Schor have challenged the categorization of *Wives and Daughters* as conventionally feminine and pastoral and recognized Gaskell's conscious engagement of "medicine, evolutionary science and exploration," their readings see her social and intellectual interventions as separate from, or in spite of, the novel's rural setting.<sup>2</sup> Focusing on Gaskell's participation in a middle-class critique of aristocratic landscaping practices, I argue, brings the countryside back to life in the novelist's work and contributes to a better understanding of the novel's class and gender politics

The *Cornhill Magazine* editor's note following the last installment of *Wives and Daughters* after Gaskell's sudden death in 1865 is indicative of her successful use of the gardenesque in her fashioning of a feminine aesthetic in her writing. Frederick Greenwood emphasizes the feminine "charm" of the novel, locating this quality in the social rituals of flowers and the nosegay and the quaintness of the rural setting. In the following passage, however, Greenwood focuses on Gaskell's portrayal of sons rather than daughters to distinguish the novelist's feminine writing style. Noting Osborne and Roger's "different tastes," the *Cornhill* editor uses the horticultural image of the blackberry bramble to describe Gaskell's artful distinction between the two brothers, a

metaphor that would have appealed to middle-class readers immersed in the cultural consumption of the countryside and rural tastes:

But it is a touch beyond the reach of art, to make their likeness in unlikeness so natural a thing that we no more wonder about it than we wonder at seeing the fruit and the bloom on the same bramble: we have always seen them there together in blackberry season, and we do not wonder about it at all. Inferior writers, even some writers who are highly accounted, would have revelled in the 'contrast,' persuaded that they were doing a fine dramatic thing by bringing it out at every opportunity. To the author of *Wives and Daughters* this was mere dislocation. She began by having the people of her story born in the usual way, and not built up like the Frankenstein monster, and thus when Squire Hamley took a wife, it was then provided that his two boys should be as naturally one and diverse as the fruit and the bloom on the bramble.<sup>3</sup>

Greenwood sees in her writing a promotion of domestic harmony rather than "dislocation," in which "contrasts" are naturalized, or "born in the usual way," rather than "built up," and he privileges the novel's organic nature in comparison with the manufactured, aberrant Frankenstein monster of Mary Shelley's gothic novel. Ultimately, he sees Gaskell's immersion in the natural and the familiar world of a domestic, rural life as representative of a vigorous, fertile English culture. Echoing the Loudons' emphasis on a gardenesque aesthetic, Greenwood's impression of Gaskell's feminine aesthetic suggests the novelist's successful application of English landscape in her exploration of the varied realities of the domestic sphere, its mixed emotions and conflicts, and its ultimately fertile possibilities.

In an unsigned 1866 review of *Wives and Daughters*, Henry James locates, like Greenwood, Gaskell's "genius" in her essentially feminine portrayal of the texture of everyday life, the objects as well as sensations that illuminate the lives of her characters.<sup>4</sup> He praises the novel's representation of social experience, its "pure feeling" over "judgement," feminine sympathy over the intellect. Like the popular image of Gaskell herself, the narrative remains "quiet" and modest, and "complete in every particular, from

the divine blue of the summer sky to the June-bugs in the rose.”<sup>5</sup> Finally, he defines Molly in terms of “the *minutiae* of her homely *bourgeois* life,” suggesting that “clean frocks and French lessons” make the character, and that material things and exterior life form the texture of human experience as well as reveal the individual’s essential nature.<sup>6</sup> Without explicitly acknowledging these specific forms of cultural capital, James touches quite evocatively upon the class significance of English landscape and gardening culture that structures Gaskell’s portrayal of a bourgeois domestic sphere. Aware of how material things shape the everyday life of the middle classes, he leaves unexamined the rural aesthetic that constitutes this way of life, the ideological labor invested in this seemingly prosaic portrait of Englishness and English womanhood.

Yet, this gap in James’ critique also reflects Gaskell’s effective use of landscape in her portrayal of the middle classes in *Wives and Daughters*. Like Greenwood and James, recent critics have also taken the metaphoric relationship between rural landscape and the woman writer’s domestic realism for granted. The devaluation of the feminine and the pastoral has obscured Gaskell’s confident participation in the charged and complex language of landscape aesthetics, a discourse that legitimates women’s perceptions of English culture and social relations and provides the grounds for a middle-class female subjectivity capable of representing, diagnosing, and healing the social body.

Many of her late twentieth-century critics have continued read Gaskell’s use of the pastoral or country setting as an apolitical, safer site for the representation of English culture in contrast with her industrial novels, *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855). Gaskell scholarship tends to value these novels for their conscious engagement with economic theory, the Chartist Movement and debates about the franchise, and the



social effects of industrialization. Yet, as critics like Hilary Schor have pointed out, novels like *Mary Barton* emphasize the reciprocal effects of public and private space and provide “a critique of the myth of a separate sphere,” thereby foregrounding Gaskell’s creative response to political and social change in British culture through a focus on a feminine domestic sphere.<sup>7</sup>

However, the reciprocal nature of private, domestic space and the public is not so recognizable in the seemingly pastoral world of *Wives and Daughters*, a novel considered, like *Cranford*, more local, more feminine, more comfortably domestic. Often grouped with *Cranford*, Gaskell’s last novel has been consistently classed as a feminine, apolitical genre. This tendency to superficially feminize her last novel persists in reenacting these flattening dualities of the political and the domestic as well as the urban and rural that she so insistently resists in her earlier narratives. This easy feminization of the pastoral in Gaskell’s writing enforces a false dichotomy between the public and private, masculine and feminine that the last twenty years of British historical and feminist critics have painstakingly worked to overcome.<sup>8</sup>

However, Hilary Schor and Deirdre D’Albertis have challenged feminist criticism’s association of Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters* with “a devalued realm of femininity” by focusing on the interweaving of social life with scientific and evolutionary discourses.<sup>9</sup> In her consideration of Gaskell’s work in terms of a masculine literary marketplace, Schor argues that feminist criticism’s “privileging of the heroic artist” often obscures the value of women writers whose lives as wives and mothers appear more conventionally feminine. In her focus on the role of concealment in Gaskell’s novels, Deirdre D’Albertis argues that *Wives and Daughters*’ pastoral setting “is never divorced from political and

economic contact with an industrialized nation," and stresses Gaskell's privileging of feminine discourses of feeling and domestic relations over masculine epistemologies of science and medicine.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, after critiquing feminist readings of the novelist's work as conventionally feminine, she notes in parenthesis the impressionistic association of Gaskell with "English flower gardens, old lace, and the aromas of tea and toilet water for some reason."<sup>11</sup> In this aside, D'Albertis falls back into the trivialization of the feminine, and overlooks that these things, flower gardens and old lace, become important media for social intervention. For the pastoral setting is, in the end, relegated to the background of these studies, and considered secondary to the novel's politics of gender and class. In the privileging of Gaskell's graceful inclusion of the nuances of Darwinian theory and debate, the rural setting is still treated as just that, a passive set of conventions used for the forwarding of plot and theme, rather than an active stage that facilitates women's negotiation of these gendered spheres of influence and inquiry.

Gaskell's "The novice and the great folk": Middle-class Vassals and Aristocratic Landscapers

The contrast between upper-class and middle-class women's modes of landscape management is sketched out in the novel's second chapter entitled, "The Novice and the Great Folk," a title that sets the tone for Gaskell's ironic critique of the English estate of the 1820's. Explicitly identifying the story's time period "before the [First] Reform Bill," the novel opens with an extended description of the young Molly's introduction to the Towers, the home of its most powerful local family, the Cumnors. Describing their sparkling fountains and velvet grounds, the narrator knowingly depicts a strict social hierarchy in the ordered layout of the beau ideal of the nineteenth-century English estate.

Taking refuge in the fresh air, Molly finds herself "unobserved" and "at liberty" to explore the grounds on her own, moving from "open park, now in some shut-in flower garden," unaware of the degree to which the variety and beauty of the estate is a product of careful cultivation, in which the outdoors has been skillfully landscaped so as to soften and blur the boundaries that reflect social power:

Green velvet lawns, bathed in sunshine stretched away on every side into the finely wooded park; if there were divisions and ha-has between the soft sunny sweeps of grass and the dark gloom of the forest-trees beyond, Molly did not see them; and the melting away of exquisite cultivation into the wilderness had an inexplicable charm for her. (14)

Divisions and ha-has are made to appear invisible and therefore natural, a goal of landscaping, the narrator points out, that is lost on the young Molly. Following the tradition celebrated in both John and Jane Loudon's popular books on the subject, the environs around the country house is subtly cultivated and controlled with rustic seats and bright flowerbeds that then gives way to a more open view, an aesthetic that presents a façade of boundless space while in reality further reinforcing these boundaries.

While the Cumnor women play a visible role as supervisors of both land and people, the narrator questions their landscaping as well as their tutelary relationship to the working classes. On this occasion, the Cumnors have opened their grounds to their humbler Hollingford neighbors, middle-class women who provide the labor for their "industrial school." The narrator further critiques the Cumnor women's aristocratic appropriation of landscape when she points out that theirs is a school "of the kind we should call 'industrial,' where girls were taught to sew beautifully, to be capital housemaids, and pretty fair cooks, and, above all, to dress neatly in a kind of uniform devised by the ladies of Cumnor Towers;--white caps, white tippetts, check aprons, blue gowns, and ready curtsies and 'please, ma'ams' being de regueur" (7). Gaskell claims in

this passage that the Cumnor's school "was not a school after the manner of school nowadays," suggesting the effects of more Liberal middle-class educational reform and emphasis on the tenant class' "intellectual" improvement (7). Finally, Gaskell's narrator mocks the Victorian nostalgic ideal of the feudal estate by emphasizing the Cumnors' many levels of social and economic control: "they did a good deal for the town, and were generally condescending and often thoughtful and kind in their treatment of their vassals" (6-7).

While Gaskell devotes most of her critique to the Cumnor women's "unapproachable dignity" that hinders sympathetic bonds between classes, she also notes aristocratic men's failure to properly foster a sympathetic relationship with their tenants (7). While Lord Cumnor is more friendly with his tenantry than his wife and daughters, and known for "putting his steward a little on one side sometimes, and taking the reins into his own hands from time to time," he is nevertheless an absent landlord, lacking sustained, personal contact with the local "work-people" (7).

In addition to the lack of sympathy between master, mistress, and tenants, Gaskell critiques the subordination of middle-class women in this rural economy. Lady Cumnor "reluctantly" stages the annual celebration ostensibly as a reward to Hollingford's "gentlewomen," but the narrative reveals a subtle system of exploitation of both middle-class women and the working classes that sustain an unsympathetic aristocracy: "The earl was lord of the manor, and owner of much of the land on which Hollingford was built; he and his household were fed, doctored, and, to a certain measure, clothed by the good people of the town" (6). Gaskell provides a middle-class critique of the unfeeling nature of the Cumnor's type of supervision; that is, Lady Cumnor returns from London year

after year to fulfill her rural responsibilities, managing others and the estate economy coldly and reluctantly:

Now as the countess was absent from the Towers for a considerable part of the year, she was glad to enlist the sympathy of the Hollingford ladies in this school, with a view to obtaining their aid as visitors during the many months that she and her daughters were away. And the various unoccupied gentlewomen of the town responded to the call of their liege lady, and gave her their service as required. (8)

Thus, the narrator's ironic commentary emphasizes the Cumnor women's role as rulers rather than cultivators of social, and their use of middle-class women for the reproduction of an obedient, efficient labor force.

Nevertheless, Gaskell shows a mixed admiration for the Cumnor women, recognizing the beauty of the carefully managed landscape, yet critical of the enforcement of a rigid social order and a lack of sympathy in their social relations. There is also a distinction made in the generations of Cumnor women. While Lady Cumnor's holds old-fashioned notions of feminine roles,<sup>12</sup> her daughters are enthusiastically involved in the polite sciences of botany, gardening, and natural history. Still, as Molly's more practical mode of sympathetic gardening will underscore, the Cumnors' scientific interests are still tainted by their interest in self-display and individual accomplishment.

Gaskell's portrayal of botany as an appropriately feminine genteel pursuit is also used to distinguish aristocratic women's artificial display of botanical knowledge from middle-class preferences for the garden as a more practical site for the cultivation of a healthy domestic sphere. An avid gardener herself with a sound knowledge of botany, Gaskell undoubtedly approved of cultivating women's tastes in gardening, and probably read and approved of Jane Loudon's many books on the subject. Unlike Loudon's protagonists, practical wives and mothers whose interest in botany is anchored in the domestic sphere, however, Lady Cumnor and her daughter Agnes' garden interests

appear ostentatious or pretentious. For example, when Mr. Gibson carries "a rare wildflower in his hand" to Agnes, she immediately recognizes the wildflower's botanical name and exclaims, "Mamma, look! This is the *Drosera rotundifolia* I have been wanting so long" (10). Displaying her formal knowledge of scientific classification, rather than using the English vernacular, Agnes' interests in botany showcase the family's wealth and standing, as the presence of a "glittering range of greenhouses and hothouses" on the estate advertises their scientific interests and access to state-of-the-art horticultural buildings and technologies.

Molly's simpler preferences for solitude and open space, and later, the small town garden over Ivory Tower forms of botany and horticulture underscore her more authentic connection to landscape as a woman of feeling who will later effect a rejuvenation of the Hamley estate and enrich the Hollingford community. The following passage privileges Molly's humble taste "for flowers in the open air" over Lady Agnes' "scientific taste" for greenhouse orchids:

Presently they came to a long glittering range of greenhouses and hothouses, and an attendant gardener was there to admit the party. Molly did not care for this half so much as for the flowers in the open air; but Lady Agnes had a more scientific taste, she expiated on the rarity of this, and the mode of cultivation required by that plant, till Molly began to feel very tired, and then very faint. (15)

The child prefers less-cultivated gardens to the structured, artificial greenhouse of Lady Agnes' botanical lectures (15). Finally, Lady Agnes' confident lecturing on botany reflects her unsympathetic use of nature and landscape for personal power rather than social good. While the hothouses and greenhouses of the Cumnor estate represent a more "scientific" orientation towards botany, Molly's attachment to local flora emphasizes her sympathy with domestic life and its social relations. Ultimately, Molly's spontaneous sympathy for others is mirrored in her spontaneous response to landscape. There are

numerous references to her innocent, yet sensual enjoyment of rural life. For example, later in the novel at Hamley, she is described as “leaning on the sill, and snuffing up the night odours of the honeysuckle” (69).

In contrast with the aristocratic Cumnor women Molly moves from a childlike, innocent appreciation for rural life and the outdoors to the more mature position as female landscaper, whose practical knowledge and use of botany, gardening, and landscape husbandry mark her moral superiority and enhance her ability to improve the lives with which she is involved; thus, her relationship to landscape is entwined with and in fact enables her role as *Wives and Daughter's* moral center or consciousness. In addition, landscape functions as the crucial medium for a bourgeois female identity, legitimating this new subjectivity as well as becoming the means for maintaining distinctions between middle-class and working class women through an economy of taste.

To underscore her critique of gender and landscape, Gaskell's initial sketch of Hollingford society shows that middle-class women do not have access to the kinds of display that the Cumnor women enjoy. In the novel's early sketch of Hollingford society, middle-class women of limited means are respectful, eager pupils, dazzled and impressed by the Lady Cumnors' expertise in matters of landscape, rather than cultivators of the social in their own right. In turn, the narrator implies that the Cumnor system of landscape husbandry is flawed and in need of reform for the very fact that this carefully managed world lacks sympathetic ties central to a healthy middle-class domestic sphere.. Hence, the narrator suggests that the Cumnors are too impersonal in their positions of authority, that their industrial school resembles a well-run factory, a structure that is

anathema to the novel's organic, domestic model of life and personal relationships. Thus, Gaskell is critical of an aristocratic insistence on the separation of the upper and working classes associated with an earlier feudal order in England, in which she is refreshingly un-nostalgic about the days of pre-Reform that many Victorians mythologized as a golden age of human relations. For what is suggested in the rigidity of social relations on the Cumnor estate and later developed in Molly's intimacy with Lady Harriet is the need for reform of the aristocratic class: while successful, its women nevertheless lack the skills of a more effective, sympathetic class of middle-class women.

As Elizabeth Langland has argued in *Nobody's Angels*, at stake in Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* is middle-class women's precarious social position, and narrative sympathy lies with women of Molly's class who require strategies for participating in a larger social sphere and establishing a genteel feminine subjectivity that will allow them to share in the kinds of activities and cultural power that aristocratic women have in the novel. Indeed, it is ultimately the liminal class positions of the governess, Miss Eyre, the schoolteacher, Mrs. Kirkpatrick before her marriage to Mr. Gibson, and the respectably poor Miss Brownings that require Molly to forge an alternative subjectivity through her appropriations of English landscape and associations with it.

Thus, Molly's sense of aversion as a child to a domesticated landscape achieved through enclosure and the dislocation of a large rural population also underscores her displacement from a secure class identity. As the daughter of a widowed country doctor of limited means, who keeps her in a relatively primitive social state until this point, Molly's class position is a tenuous one at best. Discovered by Lady Cuxhaven after having wandered away from the party and fallen asleep, Molly "found voice to say,--'I



am Molly Gibson, please. I came here with the Miss Brownings,' for her fear that she should be taken for an unauthorized intruder" (16).

Molly's fear of being an "unauthorized intruder" points to her alienation from the rigidly stratified social order represented by the Cumnor estate and policed by its women. She is then put into Mrs. Kirkpatrick's reluctant hands and brought in through the side entrance, one that bespeaks the Cumnor women's access to the leisure of the country side and the expanded domestic sphere they enjoy, in which the ante-room is the in-between space that marks feminine employment in and enjoyment of the outdoors, but also serves as the servants' entrance: "The 'side entrance' was a flight of steps leading up from a private flower-garden into a private matted hall, or ante-room, out of which many doors opened in which were deposited the light garden-tools and the bows and arrows of the young ladies of the house" (18). Molly's alienated relationship to the Cumnor women and their control of land and social relations is emphasized by her alignment with Mrs. Fitzpatrick's frustrated role as a ladies companion.

If the Cumnor estate is perhaps too strictly managed by aristocratic women, the Hamley estate represents an impoverished squierarchy in need of a more active female presence and feminine cultivation. Its rougher, unimproved nature, therefore, makes it the more fitting ground for Molly's development as a sympathetic landscaper of human relations. Squire Hamley, of self-professed ancient stock, is, like Lady Cumnor, quaintly old-fashioned yet also destructively proud and stubborn. Unlike, Lady Cumnor, however, he is ultimately unsuccessful at managing his estate, maintaining his tenants, and introducing agricultural improvements, a failure of management that is reproduced or mirrored in the Hamleys' strained domestic relations.

The squire's failed paternalism is reflected indoors as well. Gaskell implies in the obscured labor and passive nature of Mrs. Hamley that the estate has suffered from a lack of a stronger. As the narrative suggests, she lacks the strength of character needed to shape domestic relations indoors and out. Rather, she is only able to calm the squire and has an unhealthy preference for Osborne, the effete first-born who lacks the self-discipline and practical interests in agriculture and natural sciences needed to take over the estate and effectively improve its class relations as well as profits.

In the less controlled landscape of the Hamley's country house, however, Molly's worth as the spiritual daughter of the squire can be developed. (There are several references to Molly as "daughter" of the Hamleys, and late in the novel, Hamley is described as her "kingdom" which foreshadows her marriage to Roger).<sup>13</sup> Unlike at the Cumnors' minutely managed estate, Molly is able to enjoy the privacy, a middle-class value, afforded by the Hamley's more old-fashioned grounds. In contrast with her managed escort into the side entrance of the Towers, at Hamley, Molly takes the side entrance herself, enjoying the relative freedom of a comparatively untended park where she can find "a deserted walk" and "a hidden seat" that will afford her the privacy to air her feelings unobserved, "for there were not more gardeners employed upon the grounds than were necessary to keep the kitchen-gardens and such of the ornamental part as was frequented by the family, or in sight of the house, in good order" (113). The economies of the Hamley estate are what make it a hospitable space to Molly, who is able to enjoy a relative privacy both indoors and out.

Molly's naivete vis-à-vis landscape in the novel is represented in the following passage as well, when Mr. Hamley drags her from the well-stocked library for a tour of

the estate. Unlike the tours of condescension given at the Cumnors, the squire escorts her around the estate as a friendly gesture and is immediately included in the squire's concerns: "his wife and his sons, his estate, and his mode of farming:"

Molly had been in the middle of the *Bride of Lammermoor*, and would gladly have stayed indoors to finish it, but she felt the squire's kindness all the same. They went in and out of old-fashioned greenhouses, over trim lawns, the squire unlocked the great walled kitchen-garden and went about giving directions to gardeners; and all the time Molly followed him like a little dog, her mind quite full of 'Ravenswood' and 'Lucy Ashton.' (71)

Here Molly's naïve relationship to landscape is underscored by her immersion in Scott's novel and its romantic plot. However, her filial affection for the Hamleys eventually tempers her girlish immersion in novels and is replaced by her more practical interests in gardening and the domestic relations that ultimately frame Gaskell's feminization of landscape. On her first visit to Hamley, she "forgets herself," losing herself in the view from Mrs. Hamley's rooms: "A flower-garden right below; a meadow of ripe grass just beyond, changing colour in long sweeps, as the soft wind blew over it" (63). Yet her view is also obstructed, the narrator points out, "by the old walls and high-peaked roofs of the extensive farm-building," calling attention to what Molly cannot yet see: the more practical agricultural business of the estate that she must learn to appreciate and understand (63).

Though Molly's naïve, Romantic relationship to landscape reflects her natural capacity for sympathy and her English femininity, these must be tempered and refined by her responsibilities to the domestic sphere. Molly's gradual development as a cultivator of social relations is reflected in her skills as a gardener, in which the middle-class woman is portrayed as more capable in managing the social relations and responsibilities of the squire through sympathy and feminine modes of subtle intervention. Thus, Gaskell

invokes a Romantic tradition of Nature poetry in her characters' relationships to landscape while questioning its gendered associations with masculine mobility and freedom. Rather, she shows how domestic duties and pressures bar women from such a liberating, individualistic relationship to Nature. Molly runs to the outdoors but is always called back by domestic duties and "domestic raws" (100). Confined to the household because of Mrs. Gibson's misguided suspicion of her misconduct, Molly is unable to enjoy the freedoms of "wandering out at her own sweet will" (457). Able to escape domestic confinement temporarily and accompany her father on his rounds, the young woman delights in the local charm of the view just beyond Hollingford: "The woods were golden, the old house of purple-red brick, with its twisted chimneys, rose up from among them facing on to green lawns, and a placid lake; beyond again were the Malvern Hills!" (459).

However, Molly's moments of spontaneous or natural sympathy for Nature and the countryside are often abruptly interrupted by domestic pressures. Despite her sense of a wider perspective, her ability to see herself in relationship to a surrounding landscape, she is nevertheless denied the autonomy such a vision would connote for a man of her social position, and denied an escape from her domestic ties. Caught up in the delight of an open prospect, she is abruptly instructed by her father to walk home. Thus, we see the protagonist move back into the thick of domestic turmoil where her duties coexist with the dangers of public exposure. This tension is played out distinctly through her relationship to the local landscape that she moves through. Thus, on the periphery of Hollingford, she demonstrates her skills in an outdoor setting even as this journey leads her to a confrontation with Mr. Preston and public censure.

In response to these domestic pressures, Molly eventually assumes her role as a social gardener. In contrast with the Cumnor's artificial landscaped park and conservatories, Molly practices a more modest, old-fashioned mode of gardening and landscaping borrowed from Mrs. Hamley's own designs. Looking at her garden plans on paper, Roger immediately recognizes their source: "Ah, I see! You've borrowed some of your ideas from our garden at home, haven't you? This bed of scarlet geraniums, with the border of young oaks, pegged down! That was a fancy of my dear mother's" (245). While Mrs. Gibson controls the interior spaces of the Gibson home, Molly is able to exercise her own will in the garden. Her outdoor employment also affords the luxury of freer conversation with Roger, for, according to the narrator, "It really was a case of virtue is its own reward, for it was far pleasanter to her to have him in a tete-a-tete, however short than in the restraint of Mrs. Gibson and Cynthia's presence" (245). Finally, this garden scene displays the best of Molly's character, qualities that Roger will no doubt appreciate in her as a wife. She is practically invested in cultivating the domestic sphere and able to gently manage the working classes to maintain it. For he finds her "deep in her employment," capable and willing to do outdoor labor as well as kindly overseeing the "old gardener," Williams, all the while maintaining a feminine decorum in her "brown-holland gardening apron" (244).

In *Wives and Daughters*, landscape, natural history, botany, and gardening are represented as interdependent rather than mutually exclusive fields and become extensions of the domestic sphere or tools for its improvement. Roger and Molly's implied union ultimately represents the novel's promotion of a gardenesque marriage of science and aesthetics, reason and feeling, imperial expansion and domestic

improvement. Reconsidering the representations of Molly and Roger as a gardenesque couple illuminates women's collusion in the architecture of imperialism through their appropriation of English landscape and the cultivation of "home" in a broader, national sense. Thus, gardening expertise, botany, and similarly "polite" sciences like natural history are expressions and extensions of bourgeois women's appropriation of landscape discourse, a colorful debate ostensibly dominated for centuries by upper-class men. In the context of Victorian culture, the countryside and the rural play fundamental roles in the formation of the subject at "home"—enabling a complementary, gendered ideological project that Englishwomen could perform in terms of a national domestic sphere shaped in part by imperial expansion abroad.

As John Loudon emphasized in his guides for suburban living, the gardenesque was a heterosexual affair that required men to contribute to a healthy domestic sphere. While D'Albertis has argued that Gaskell privileges women's personal knowledge of the domestic sphere over masculine epistemologies of medicine and science, Gaskell blurs these gendered lines of knowledge in her representation of Roger Hamley, who applies his expertise in natural history and geography to foster stronger family ties and personal relationships as well as a colonial identity. A successful explorer abroad, Roger's expertise in natural history begins literally at home and is firmly developed in terms of family ties and sympathy. Fulfilling the duties of the squire's son, Roger is immersed in the outdoors in terms of estate husbandry (in the local and domestic sense) as well as continually employed in an exploration of the environment as part of a larger, global epistemology of science. It is the falsification of the sciences as bounded or closed systems rather than tools or aids for improving social relations and community that the

novel seems to indirectly critique. Thus, women novelists like Gaskell suggest a kind of humanism that supercedes and works against the fragmenting effects of modern specialization.

While claiming to be a "lover of nature" in the pursuit of scientific inquiry, Roger exhibits the ideals of a gardenesque life, one based on self-sufficiency, productivity, and a commitment to domestic relations. Thus, he often employs his knowledge of natural history and botany as a mode of sympathy, translating into practical use for tending to domestic relationships. When he finds Molly in the garden distraught about her father's approaching marriage to Mrs. Kirkpatrick, he uses his outdoor skills to comfort her, first with refreshment, "bringing a little [water] in a broad green leaf, turned into an impromptu cup" (115); then he "nurses" Molly's interest in natural history as a means of healthy distraction: "He tried to interest her in his pursuit, cherished her first little morsel of curiosity, and nursed it into a very proper desire for information. Then he brought out books on the subject, and translated the slightly pompous language into homely, every-day speech" (120-121).<sup>14</sup> Roger sympathizes with feminine feeling and uses his scientific interests in the context of the domestic sphere, often using his knowledge as a means for helping others rather than treating it a purely objective pursuit.

Even Mr. Gibson, who often claims a gruff disinterest in social niceties, participates in the gardenesque aesthetic, successfully domesticated by Mrs. Gibson, and the novel implies, the rest of Hollingford's women. His earlier mentioned gift of a wildflower to Lady Agnes shows the strategic, rather than simply sentimental nature of floriculture in *Wives and Daughters* for the middle classes, for both men and women. The wildflower Mr. Gibson brings is from Cumnor Moss, and though it is a specimen of

English flora, more significantly, it comes from Cumnor property. In this instance, the wildflower represents Cumnor lineage and land rights: its presentation is a kind of homage that provides the ambiguously placed doctor with an appropriate language to successfully mix with his social superiors. Thus, Molly's entry into an upper-class social milieu is facilitated by her father's careful diplomacy. Hence, for both men and women of liminal social positions, gentility is represented through the lexicon of landscape.

Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* represents one of the most complete literary examples of bourgeois women's successful appropriation of landscape aesthetics for the purposes of consolidating a middle-class feminine subjectivity. The Victorian gardening craze and the popularity of rural life and imagery in the cultural imagination extend the domestic sphere to the outdoors but also provide a complex discourse and set of associations that are used to expand women's social role and participation in English culture. Molly's sympathetic relationship to local landscape betrays a rich tradition of practical and popular books on horticulture, botany, and landscape written as well as read avidly by women. Particular to this tradition is a subtle, but powerful critique of aristocratic traditions of landscape, in which velvet lawns, ha-has, and elaborate gardens reflect the upper classes' alienation from the working classes and their inability to manage social relations and resolve class conflict sympathetically. This tradition provides a deeper understanding of the role of class in the definition of a female subjectivity in the novel because it illuminates women's active participation in the construction of an English national identity that privileges a gardenesque, rather than picturesque aesthetic.



### Notes

<sup>1</sup> All in-text citations for Elizabeth Gaskell from *Wives and Daughters* (1865), ed. Pam Morris, London: Penguin Books, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Pam Morris, "Introduction," *Wives and Daughters* (1865), by Elizabeth Gaskell. London: Penguin Books, 1996, (xxiii, xxv).

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Greenwood, "A Note from the Cornhill Editor," in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* (1865), ed. Pam Morris, London: Penguin Books, 1996, 652.

<sup>4</sup> Henry James, "an unsigned review of *Wives and Daughters*," in *Elizabeth Gaskell, The Critical Heritage*, ed. Angus Easson, London: Routledge, 1991, 50-52.

<sup>5</sup> James, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, 463.

<sup>6</sup> James, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, 465.

<sup>7</sup> Hilary Schor focuses on how double plots in *Mary Barton* and *North and South* function as "a critique of the myth of a separate sphere." See *Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Bodenheimer uses her concept of "the politics of story" to argue that the political and domestic are mutually defined in Gaskell's industrial novels, in *The Politics of Story in Victorian Social Fiction*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988

<sup>9</sup> Deirdre D'Albertis, *Dissembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text*, New York: St. Martins Press, 1997, 10.

<sup>10</sup> D'Albertis, *Dissembling Fictions*, 137.

<sup>11</sup> D'Albertis, *Dissembling Fictions*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Cumnor's suppression of emotion, her extreme emphasis on self-control, management of self and others, is portrayed as harmful to her health. In contrast, her daughters seem to be better adjusted, comfortable assuming roles as wives and daughters while overseeing and manipulating Hollingford's social life.

<sup>13</sup> The novel does not dispute the squire's insistence on his ancient English lineage: 'Now is it not a queer quip of Nature,' continued the squire, turning his honest face towards Molly, as if he was going to impart a new idea to her, 'that I, a Hamley of Hamley, . as good and as old a descent as any man in England, and I doubt if a stranger to look at me, would take me for a gentleman . . . ' (73). The strong linkage of the Hamleys with an

ancient English lineage crucial to Molly's upward mobility and subjectivity that transcends her status as a doctor's daughter.

<sup>14</sup> If Roger's position as Molly's teacher seems condescendingly patriarchal, we must take into account that Jane Loudon's goal in her publications was to "translate" seemingly unfamiliar facts, making these subjects accessible and useful within the domestic sphere. That Roger fills this role includes him within the gardenesque paradigm of female subjectivity that Molly is being groomed for in the novel.

CHAPTER 5  
"BUILT TO LAST AND BUILT TO BE LOVELY": JOHN RUSKIN'S SUBURBAN  
QUEENS AND DOROTHEA BROOKE'S COTTAGES IN GEORGE ELIOT'S  
*MIDDLEMARCH* (1871)

And wherever a true wife comes, this home is round her. The stars only may be over her head, the glow-worm in the night-cold grass may be the only fire at her foot, but home is yet wherever she is; and for a noble woman it stretches far round her, better than ceiled with cedar or painted with vermillion, shedding its light far, for those who else were homeless.

--John Ruskin, "Of Queens' Gardens," *Sesame and Lilies* 1865

In Chapter Two, Jane Loudon's household and gardening manual heroine, Alice, approaches landscape improvement from the feminine orientation of the home. Her dual focus on utility and beauty, sanitary principles and light, air, and color as sources of health and pleasure is extended to the surrounding village and its cottagers' home life, ostensibly to produce more industrious servants with the skills necessary to cater to bourgeois domestic tastes in household manners, sanitation, cooking, and gardening as well as bolster her husband's relationship to his laborers. In the previous chapter, Gaskell's gardenesque heroine, Molly Gibson, cultivates a sympathetic relationship to landscape, suggesting at the end of *Wives and Daughters* a healthier Hamley Hall, in which a failed paternalism is replaced by a more flexible, rational maternalism. Like the Loudons and Gaskell, Eliot also promotes women's stewardship of a gardenesque model of reform in order to critique a failed paternalism, but in the context of less malleable landlords, a chaotic political system, and a more pervasive fear of working-class dissent and violence.

My reading therefore situates Eliot as a cultivator of women as "social gardeners" or landscapers over and against her perceived failure of rural paternalism represented in Dorothea's well-meaning, but ineffective uncle, Mr. Brooke. While feminist criticism of *Middlemarch* has questioned Eliot's choice of a provincial setting that limits its heroine's social mission, in contrast with the successful London-based authoress herself, the social problems of industrialization like urban poverty, the increased interest in and need for sanitary reform, and political and class antagonism nevertheless permeate the text. Set on the eve of the first Reform Bill, and written contemporaneously with the second, Eliot uses the provincial setting to critique the negative effects of a masculine tradition of landscape consumption as well as an ineffective, self-serving political system. As Eliot makes clear in *Felix Holt*, she is profoundly distrustful of politics, and, in particular, a politicized working class. Positing political labels as signs of cultural confusion, the narrator reflects her ambivalence about universal suffrage: "Tory, Whig, and Radical did not perhaps become clearer in their definition of each other; but the names seem to acquire so strong a sense of honour or infamy, that definitions would only have weakened the impression."<sup>1</sup>

Drawing upon Ruskin's critique of an irresponsible picturesque tradition and anxiety about class conflict, Eliot uses landscape to call attention to the social and political neglect of local class relations in *Middlemarch*. Landowners like Mr. Brooke, Sir James Chettam, and Mr. Casaubon who occupy privileged, ostensibly objective positions to both their own landscaped parks of Tipton, Freshitt, and Lowick. However, without feminine supervision, Eliot seems to argue, these extensive views obscure or overlook the day-to-day needs of their tenants and their domestic and moral health. As

Raymond Williams has observed in *The Country and the City*, “the very idea of landscape implies separation and observation.”<sup>2</sup> Through these depictions, Eliot suggests women’s ability to close this gap, the need for more women as managers of social relations, whose intelligent sympathy provides the most effective means for nurturing the British “social body” through more local, intimate views of landscape associated with the domestic sphere.

Thus, while Ruskin’s landscape ideals inform George Eliot’s cautious liberalism and vision of reform in *Middlemarch*, Eliot also critiques masculine epistemologies of seeing that still hinder these ideals. Eliot does not simply critique the landed classes’ mismanagement of their estates and the potential revolt of their tenants by arguing for greater “sympathy” between landlord and tenant. Rather, Eliot takes Ruskin’s critique of the picturesque a step further in both genre and emphasis. While the form of narrative enables her to critically examine landscape as a social and cultural discourse, rather than rural backdrop for the development of individual characters, it also extends the domain of landscape to include a distinctly feminine component. Through Dorothea’s passionate involvement local housing reform, she articulates the need to approach landscape from the orientation of domestic life and feminine experience. While Eliot shares a belief in landscapes civilizing influence, she critiques masculine epistemologies that assume views that obscure the value of interior life; thus, she argues, the beauty of nature and landscape are dependent upon the health of domestic relationship, insisting that the interior life of domestic relations should form the index or blueprint for appreciation of the exterior landscape.

In addition to revisioning landscape in terms of the feminine, Eliot also uses the powerful lexicon of an English rural aesthetic to privilege a more authentic femininity over an artificial and materialistic femininity. Thus, while Dorothea is shown actively moving in the local landscape, visiting cottager's homes while also enjoying the physical pleasure of the outdoors, Rosamond is "industrious," but for the purpose of "sketching her landscapes and market-carts," making landscape a feminine accomplishment that merely advertises her sexual desirability (115).<sup>3</sup> While Dorothea's social sympathies frames her approach to a humanized landscape in need of women's inscaping, women like Celia Brooke and Rosamond Vincy are negatively marked by their artificial relationship to landscape, in which social welfare and individual improvement are sacrificed for feminine effect and material gain in domestic enclaves falsely separated from a wider social body.

As Jonathan Loesberg has pointed out, Eliot scholarship's dominant concern has been with the nature of her aesthetic vision and principles and how these shape her theory of realism, her aim to render a portrait of the world that would both accurately represent life while simultaneously engendering a moralized response to it. Loesberg believes that her ethical concerns shape her aesthetics but claims that Eliot rejects the English Burkean theory of aesthetics for a Hegelian one that privileges the observing consciousness able to both apprehend "real" conditions while perceiving their social significance, a dual way of seeing that promises concrete improvements in the lives of the people that fall under the gaze of the visionary.<sup>4</sup>

However, Loesberg does not explicitly address the problematic of the picturesque in *Middlemarch's* class politics—the ways of seeing that she explores in depth in both the

provincial setting and the Italian honeymoon, in which it is educated men who would have conventionally enjoyed these values of perception, in which artistic sympathy is a value afforded to those whose intelligence and education engender the humanizing link between viewer and viewed, observer and landscape. Yet it is Dorothea's desire to improve the lives of others, to claim a civic duty within local contexts is limited by her sex, by conventional views of women's roles and influence that her sister more successfully embodies. Thus, *Middlemarch*, by privileging Dorothea's emotional investment in a landscape emphasizing work, productivity, and healthy domestic relations actually clarifies the very aesthetic conundrum Loesberg locates in Eliot's realism. Uncovering more specifically the middle-class revisioning of landscape in terms of domesticity, and women's authorization within this enterprise, illuminates the stakes of Eliot's aesthetic politics as well as its tensions.

Despite a rich tradition of nineteenth-century landscape literature concerned with social critique, however, *Middlemarch* scholarship has generally treated Dorothea Brooke's architectural plans and enthusiasm for cottage improvement as signs of her exclusion from a fulfilling vocation and her status as a modern St. Theresa, "foundress of nothing" (xiv). Her desire "to make poverty beautiful," has, in this same vein, been seen as representative of Dorothea's frustrated feminine subjectivity, or a misguided attempt to participate in a public life from which she is ultimately excluded.<sup>5</sup>

Yet as the nineteenth-century trend of the gardenesque aesthetic demonstrates, middle-class ideology and subjectivity are deeply indebted to and dependent on architectural and landscape theory. Thus, this chapter places Dorothea's passion for cottage architecture in the context of a nineteenth-century feminine mode of landscaping

intended to ameliorate class conflict and create a sense of national identity. The heroine's architectural plans for better cottages serve the dual function of imagining a means to control the working classes while also defining an enlightened feminine subjectivity. Thus, Eliot critiques a morally bankrupt landholding class and its mismanagement of land and social relations by promoting a heroine sympathetically attuned to "Nature," but who sees beauty in landscape from the perspective of women's domestic duties, individual conduct, and community ties. "Not at ease in the perspective and chilliness of that height" associated with an aristocratic, masculine tradition of landscape, Dorothea prefers a local, maternal form of landscape husbandry administered in practical ways in specific homes that inhabit the countryside" (223).

George Eliot, Ruskin's High and Low Picturesque, and the Class Politics of the Cottage in Middlemarch

Eliot's revision of landscape in Middlemarch is indebted to both the Loudons and Ruskin's belief in the humanizing and civilizing influence of landscape and the garden in Victorian culture and the role of women in its dissemination. Most significantly, these writers saw the nation-state itself as a metaphorical garden requiring middle-class women's sympathetic management. The Loudons' garden and home literature in the 30's and 40's sowed the ideological seeds for Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), which celebrates the domestic woman's natural love for garden and landscape, who brings her sympathetic mode of management to a suffering cityscape. In *Sesame and Lilies*, Ruskin's suburban queen brings not just her portable domestic skills of beauty and order to the ailing cityscape, she also brings the civilizing properties of English landscape itself, its associations with healthy individualism and national identity, to other less gardenesque spaces. If Loudon and Ruskin's appeals to England's middle-class women's



genteel nature and taste ring too sentimental, they nevertheless represent an influential landscape gardening tradition that insisted on women's contributions—to the garden itself as an extension of the domestic space and its ideals, but also a broader middle-class appropriation of the rural estate's cultural currency to be used in a host of spaces at home and abroad.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to his vision of women as gardeners of the social, Ruskin's readings of landscape are devoted to questions of class identity and sympathy. Ultimately, Ruskin is deeply aware of the social implications and importance of rural representations to a national politics of conservative reform. Concerned with class conflict and rural revolt, he seeks to harmonize morality and aesthetics, which he sees as irresponsibly separated in the popular picturesque. In her own reflections on class tensions and social disorder, Eliot incorporates Ruskin's critique of the "low picturesque" that he developed in his *Modern Painters* series in Dorothea's ambivalent orientation to the Middlemarch landscape.

Therefore, in order to appreciate Eliot's position vis-à-vis women and landscape it is necessary to understand Ruskin's picturesque hierarchy, which aligns the "high" picturesque with feminine values of though he does not address gender explicitly. In his essay "On the Turnerian Picturesque," Ruskin distinguishes between a "high" and "low" picturesque, a "noble" style and one of "surface."<sup>7</sup> Ruskin assigns the conventional picturesque appreciation of surface effects—of irregularity of color, light, and shape to "the low school of the surface picturesque; that which fills ordinary drawing books and scrap-books, and employs, perhaps the most popular living landscape painters of France, England and Germany" (16).

In contrast with the popular genre of rustic nostalgia, Ruskin's essay privileges Turner's landscapes for their intimacy and sympathy, qualities also associated with a healthy domestic sphere and more organic forms of labor, qualities that would have appealed to a middle-class audience anxious to participate in a Protestant work ethic and securing it social relevance. Critical of the rural representation as popular commodity, Ruskin then valorizes the "tender sympathy" of the artist who sees below the surface an inner life and narrative:

But if these same outward characters be sought for in subordination to the inner character of the object, every source of pleasurable being refused which is incompatible with that, while perfect sympathy is felt at the same time with the object as to all that it tells of itself in those sorrowful bywords, we have the school of true or noble picturesque . . . while it is distinguished still more from the schools of the lower picturesque by its tender sympathy, and its refusal of all sources of pleasure inconsistent with the perfect nature of the thing to be studied. (16)

Similarly, in his comparison of Turner and Stanfield's mills, Ruskin finds in the former "a largeness of sympathy" that is lacking in the latter. An example of the lower picturesque, Stanfield's mill "is eminently a heartless one," because the painter seems to delight in the mill's and the mill owner's ruin, reflecting a parasitic relationship void of sympathy.

On the other hand, Turner's representation of the "high" picturesque, as a "higher condition of art," locates value and beauty in the mill's utility, its "serviceableness," and the way of life that it precariously sustains. For Ruskin, finally, "sympathy" connotes or implies the legitimate grounds for social intervention and improvement, in which the act of painting is transformed into a valuable type of work that resolves the distance between subject and object, reflecting an underlying desire to resolve the class tensions implicit in this aesthetic hierarchy of seeing.<sup>8</sup>

For Ruskin, then, the high picturesque ameliorates, at least imaginatively, the more troubling aspects of rural life, its hardships and effects of enclosure that have progressively divested the peasantry of their livelihood and independence. Participating in a long nineteenth-century critique of the picturesque, Ruskin's ideas were undoubtedly fostered by popular exposes of poverty in the industrial landscape as well, in places like Manchester and the metropolis, gathered in the 30's and 40's by Mayhew, Engels, and medical reports by Southwood Smith, of urban poverty and devastating slum conditions as sites breeding disease and social disorder. In Ruskin, however, this critical perspective is turned upon rural laborers' homes and cottages, whose static passivity in landscape painting belied the underlying tensions caused by agricultural enclosures and the neglect of resulting social problems of displacement, poverty, and unsanitary living conditions.

George Eliot's class politics were generally conservative; that is, like other moderate liberals she wanted better conditions for the poor and working classes but only if administered through the benevolent supervision of the educated middle classes. This belief in the middle classes' role as benevolent overseers of class relations is manifested in her focus on the cottage in *Middlemarch* as a site of working-class agitation as well as potential reform. Her use of the cottage as an imaginary site for national unity and class harmony is indebted to and therefore best understood in terms of John Loudon's and John Ruskin's passionate writings on the subject.

Concerns echoed in *Middlemarch*'s anxieties about class revolt and violence, Ruskin's criticisms reach their highest pitch in his attack on the poor and unhealthy state of rural England's cottages. He reads in the cheaply built new housing for the poor "comfortless and unhonoured dwellings without difference and without fellowship" and

signs of "popular discontent" that are "ominous, infectious, and fecund" (226-227). In the face of the material conditions of a real populace who, unlike Ruskin's silent, noble fisherman, have more visible, legitimate grounds for "complaint," the critic's architectural politics takes on a more explicitly middle-class domestic bent.

Ruskin's focus on the "fecund" threat inherent in cottage architecture ultimately represents a middle-class ideology of domestic space that equates social stability with domestic peach. Like many reform-minded Victorians worried about the glaring disparities between rich and poor, and the lack of sympathy between classes, Ruskin believed domestic architecture itself to be the most effective kind of reform, in which each house would serve to both reflect and contain difference: "I would have, then, our ordinary dwelling-houses built to last, and built to be lovely... but at all events, with such differences as might suit and express each man's character and occupation, and partly his history" (229). At the same time, he incorporates the more modern spirit of bourgeois individualism, in which dwellings that "suit and express each man's character" contain and reflect the differences between, for example, an old labourer and a more prosperous farmer, while asserting an equivalency, a sense of shared humanity in the beauty of discrete, separate dwellings for every man.

Of course, Ruskin must have had in mind Loudon's practical manuals on domestic architecture and his careful cataloguing of working-class cottages intended to perfectly suit the location, status, size, and occupation of working families. In his popular 1838 *Encyclopedia of Cottages*, which went into multiple editions in the latter half of the century, Loudon provided over eighty distinctly detailed plans, claiming in the preface that "the mode of building" determined "the mode of living and the manners" of the

inhabitants, and the goal "to create and diffuse among mankind generally, a taste for agricultural comforts and beauties."<sup>9</sup> Thus, Eliot's use of Loudon reflects her shared interest in domestic architecture and its transparency, its ability to transform the "masses" through a gardenesque aesthetic intended to recreate community in the attractive, discrete ordering of individual households and gardens, sites that are controlled and cultivated, sanitary and safe, rather than "ominous, infectious, and fecund." This aesthetic also includes an emphasis on privacy, an ethic of industry/productivity, and a cultivation of individual duty and responsibility that would contribute to the health of the nation state. And it is women, Loudon and Ruskin both argue passionately, who are best equipped to cultivate this aesthetic in the "masses."

Ruskin attributes the virtue of "tender sympathy" for landscape to the nurturing domestic woman in his outlining of men and women's respective social roles in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865). As Ruskin's appeal to a monarchy of suburban queens suggests, landscape aesthetics and the garden had become essential mediums for the expression of a middle-class vision of social reform for country and city alike. And Ruskin fervently believes in the ability of the woman herself, through a "royal education" in the values of home and garden, to carry "order and beauty" beyond suburban retreats and into the public spaces of impoverished landscape and cityscape. Indeed, Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* appeals to the potential transnational effects of women's sympathetic landscaping of the social:

I am now going to ask you to consider with me further, what special portion or kind of this royal authority, arising out of noble education, may rightly be possessed by women; and how far they are also called to a truly queenly power,--not in their households merely, but over all within their sphere. And in what sense, if they rightly understood and exercised this royal or gracious influence, the order and

beauty induced by such benignant power would justify us in speaking of the territories over which each of them reigned as 'Queen's Gardens.'<sup>10</sup>

Although conventional in his assumption of women's ancillary position to men, Ruskin nevertheless urge women of the middle and upper classes to leave the shelter of their suburban gardens and arm themselves with sympathy and taste for the benefit of the "commonwealth, . . . to assist in the ordering, in the comforting, and in the beautiful adornment of the state."<sup>11</sup>

Declaring "The whole country is but a little garden," Ruskin believes the domestic woman embodies the virtues of a domesticated landscape that must be transported to an urbanized world of competition and suffering, as well as beyond national borders to the colonies that fall under Queen Victoria's imperial territories.<sup>12</sup> Essential to this romantic image of nurturing womanhood is the garden itself and its metonymic relationship to the home that protects, nurses, and restores others who lie beyond landscaped suburban enclaves, "far in the darkness of the terrible streets, these feeble florets are lying, with all their fresh leaves torn and their stems broken."<sup>13</sup> (165). However, as the following section will address, to claim this power, women must resist the constructions of landscape that conflate or support an artificial image of womanhood and its negative associations with feminine artificiality and materialism, in which women like Celia Brooke and Rosamond Vincy fail to serve others beyond their well-furnished parlours and flowered terraces.

Dorothea Brooke, "The spirit of Oberlin," and the Desire to Make Poverty Beautiful

Like Ruskin, George Eliot's *Middlemarch* heroine, Dorothea Brooke, engages in a vision of the rural landscape that evokes and registers distinctions between high and low picturesque ways of seeing in order to critique a system of failed paternalism in rural England. Thus, she takes Ruskin's conception of the high picturesque further by insisting

on the value of women's more practical observations of domestic realities in local contexts. She suggests in the figure of the heroine the need for a more feminine approach to landscape that will more effectively achieve social reform through local philanthropy and supervision, rather than a more masculine tradition of landscape associated with Classical knowledge that maintains a false objectivity and distance from the working classes. Eliot's critique of a failed paternalism also attacks its inability to foster women's role as benevolent managers of class relations.

For while Ruskin confidently urges an army of women to leave their secure *place* within the walled gardens and protective privacy of their suburban homes, Eliot foregrounds a heroine whose ardent and sympathetic nature lacks a place or social context, whose heart, like St. Theresa's, "beat[s] to a national idea; until domestic reality met [her] in the shape of uncles . . . Many Therasas have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action" (xiii). She yearns for a life "filled with action at once rational and ardent," and to embrace a meaningful and fulfilling vocation (58). The narrator's ironic reference to "domestic reality . . . in the shape of uncles," therefore, highlights middle and upper-class women's often frustrated, limited access to a broader sphere of social action, yet it is also notes her status as a genteel woman which gives her access to the homes of people who live on her uncle's estate and allows her a platform, albeit one subject to narrow-minded public opinion and dependent on patriarchal patronage, to practice local philanthropy, which the novel privileges over "paper liberalism" or classical education. Thus, her desire for a social vocation is frustrated by both the community's expectation of her duty to become a gentleman's wife, her dependency on patriarchal authority in the form of

uncles, and most intractable of all, the intellectual and moral limitations of the husband she initially selects as her mentor and guide.

Dorothea marries Causabon to participate in "provinces of masculine knowledge" denied her because of her limited education (42). She attributes to the dessicated scholar (bless him) access to a masculine tradition of landscape and prospect, a tradition in which upper-class men had the leisure and education to survey expanses of space and Nature as coherent wholes. Eliot stresses the metaphorical link between masculine epistemology and landscape when she compares Dorothea's hopes for her prospective marriage to "a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly" (42). Indeed, Dorothea wants to justify her Christian zeal for reform with a stronger foundation than "the small tinkling and smearing" of "domestic music and feminine fine art" she calls her education:

... how could she be confident that one-roomed cottages were not for the glory of God, when men who knew the classics appeared to conciliate indifference to the cottages with zeal for the glory. Perhaps even Hebrew might be necessary to—at least the alphabet and a few roots—in order to arrive at the core of things, and judge soundly on the social duties of the Christian. (42)

The narrator subverts the heroine's matrimonial hopes in the novel's introduction of Lowick, Casaubon's estate, which foreshadows the limited sympathy and intellect of the owner. At first, Eliot describes Lowick as an estate that commands a view and respectably aestheticizes ownership with the use of the ha-ha, "...a sunk fence between park and pleasure ground, so that from the drawing-room windows the glance swept uninterruptedly along a slope of greensward till the limes ended in a level of corn and pastures, which often seemed to melt into the lake under the setting sun" (48). While the prior description evokes the classic English country house and park, the home itself lacks an active, more fluid relationship to the landscape celebrated by women interested in



cultivating the gardenesque, an aesthetic that harmonizes domestic duty and social reform.

Lowick is ultimately hostile to women's landscaping of the social. There is a darker side to the South-East end of the house, which is "more confined, the flower-beds showed no very careful tendance, and large clumps of trees, chiefly of somber yews, had risen high, not ten yards from the windows." Finally, the narrator suggests, the house lacks a fundamental feminine architecture or sympathy, for "the building of greenish stone, was in the old English style, not ugly, but small windowed and melancholy-looking: the sort of house that must have children, many flowers, open windows and little vistas of bright things, to make it a joyous home" (48).

Marriage does not, as it should, foster Dorothea's social role in the Lowick landscape. Dorothea's emotional isolation from her husband and the sense of social isolation that follows is dramatically rendered in interior scenes of Lowick. Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon and her establishment at Lowick form the figurative glass pane that separates her from an active, social role in shaping the landscape, which positions them as passive consumers rather than "muscular" architects of their lives and others'. During her marriage, the narrative passively positions her within the house. She experiences a shrinking of existence in terms of domestic enclosures that signify nullity and oppression rather than safety; her marriage is "an enclosed basin" where Casaubon is "lost among small closets and winding stairs" (136). After her honeymoon in Rome, Dorothea returns to Lowick and its "moral imprisonment which made itself one with the chill, colourless, narrowed landscape" (189). At Lowick she must give up her plans for new cottages in exchange for a frustratingly interiorized life of "motiveless ease:" "there was the stifling

oppression of that gentlewoman's world...where the sense of connection with a pregnant manifold existence had to be kept up painfully as an inward vision" (189).

In addition to patriarchal resistance of uncles, Dorothea's sympathetic involvement with an inhabited English countryside, her cottage visiting and local philanthropy, is often interrupted by the materialistic concerns that define feminine gentility in terms of a more rigidly enclosed landscape. Thus, while the novel participates in an anti-picturesque tradition that promotes type of landscape husbandry stewarded by broad-minded sympathetic individuals, including women of a specific class and taste, this inclusion is ultimately mediated by a gendered politics of exclusion. Genteel women's access to the homes of the poor provides the grounds for feminine sympathy and its application; the paradox, however, is the comparative sense of social isolation and immobility within the country house that frames their status.

Eliot's social critique and class politics reach their height in Dorothea's exchanges with her uncle and her attempts to reform Tipton Grange's cottagers through better cottages and women's benevolent supervision. In contrast with the distancing rhetoric of the picturesque, Dorothea practices a local landscape aesthetic. I would argue that Eliot takes Ruskin's conception of the high picturesque further by insisting on superiority of women's more practical observations of domestic realities in local contexts. For Eliot, the high picturesque involves an uncomfortable closeness and even painful awareness of the material conditions and their psychological effects on the cottagers' home lives. Thus, Eliot extends high realism's aesthetic sympathy to a specifically feminine consciousness attune to the social value of landscape in terms of experience of from within the contexts of the domestic sphere.<sup>14</sup> Dorothea's approach to landscape is better understood in Mary

Poovey's terms as a "feminized epistemology of sympathy," in which her desire to rebuild cottages on her uncle's estate are spurred by her visits to individual cottagers homes and her personal observation of domestic decay, poverty, and illness, personal, local experience that is intended to authorize her influence in more public spaces (43).

For example, Dorothea's intimate knowledge of the Dagley's domestic life indoors reveals a much more disturbing portrait of rural life than Turner's sensitive sketches of the hard working rural laborer who works without complaint. Dorothea's experience as a cottage visitor preempts any "surface" enjoyment of the picturesque portraits that her uncle is so fond of. In the following passage, Dorothea tries to spur her Uncle to improvement by describing the interior lives of her uncles' tenants (which she suggests, he has never seen):

"Think of Kit Downes, uncle, who lives with his wife and seven children in a house with one sitting-room and one bed-room hardly larger than this table!—and those poor Dagleys, in their tumble-down farmhouse, where they live in the back kitchen and leave the other rooms to the rats! That is one reason why I did not like the pictures here, dear uncle—which you think me stupid about. I used to come from the village with all that dirt and coarse ugliness like a pain within me, and the simpering pictures in the drawing room seemed to me like a wicked attempt to find delight in what is false, while we don't mind how hard the truth is for the neighbors outside our walls. I think we have no right to come forward to urge wider changes for good, until we have tried to alter the evils which lie under our own hands."  
(269)

Like the work of England's most popular painters that Ruskin alludes to in his critique of the low picturesque, Dorothea rejects the "simpering pictures in the drawing room" because they "delight in what is false;" because they sentimentalize the squalor of household conditions that she has observed in the cottages. Rejecting these sugar-coated images of rural life, she carries her own impressions "like a pain within" her, a pain that she wishes to alleviate with the building of "good cottages" (18). Dorothea is a practitioner of "high" picturesque principles whose sympathetic nature enables her to

see landscape in terms of social relations and humanitarian ideals from the point of view of domestic life and its spaces.

George Ford has argued that the image of the cottage in Victorian culture, paintings and literature, represents a way of life that is nostalgic, "a Golden Age" that positions the rural as the symbolic heart and home of a pre-industrialized England (29).<sup>15</sup> However, he argues that novelists like George Eliot represent a "duality;" they at once invoke a pastoral ideal and uncover a more disturbing reality (34). After quoting the passage that frames Mr. Brooke's awkward confrontation with his tenants, the Dagleys, at Freeman's End, Ford defines what he sees as Eliot's dual way of seeing the rural cottage:

With her Midlands background she can view the cottager's life from the inside, with warmth and affection; with her experience as one of the most learned writers of her generation, she can view it from a different perspective. As an intellectual, she is aware of the sometimes stagnant mentality of the rural scene (37).

Ford separates the more sympathetic view of "the cottager's life from the inside" from the (outside) "intellectual" perception of a "stagnant mentality," positions that he defines without attention to gender or class privilege. But, for Eliot, the upper-middle class woman's gendered perspective enables her to unite or suture the apparent gap between the "inside" and "outside," "affection" and "intellect," subject and object; her intimate knowledge of the Dagleys' domestic life becomes the impetus for "healthy cottages" that she believes will heal social unrest from the cottage outward.

Therefore, the genteel heroine locates the proper site for high picturesque "values" in the rural estate's domestic architecture, its cottages, which signals her ambition not simply to alter the countryside but to inculcate middle-class standards of cleanliness, order, and beauty that will transform the landscape both indoors and out. In the following

passage, she cites Loudon as the source of her plans for cottage reform in a conversation with Sir James Chettam, a neighboring landowner whom she wishes to influence:

"I think we deserve to be beaten out of our beautiful houses with a scourge of small cords—all of us who let tenants live in such sties as we see around us. Life in cottages might be happier than ours, if they were real houses fit for human beings from whom we expect duties and affections."

"Will you show me your plan?"

"Yes, certainly. I daresay it is very faulty. But I have been examining Loudon's book, and picked out what seem the best things. Oh what a happiness it would be to set the pattern about here! I think, instead of Lazarus at the gate, we should put the pig-sty cottages outside the park gate."

Dorothea was in the best temper now. Sir James, as brother-in-law, building model cottages on his estate, and then, perhaps, others being built at Lowick, and more elsewhere in imitation—it would be as if the spirit of Oberlin had passed over the parishes to make the life of poverty beautiful! (19-20)

While Dorothea's speech does indeed reflect a naïve nostalgia, her use of Loudon and her daily attention to cottage visiting with a careful eye for interior inspection also reflects the relevance of Loudon's socially engaged landscape aesthetics, that had very practical approaches for "civilizing" the working classes through the supervision and reorientation of domestic space. Here Dorothea is advocating the removal of cottages that appear picturesque to the unfeeling landowner's eye, but painful to the woman who has visited their inmates; her approach also strongly suggests that rather than the common practice of levelling dilapidated cottages and the often subsequent removal of the rural population from the country-house environs, she wants to bring the tenants closer to the house to promote sympathetic ties and enable greater supervision of female visitors like herself.

Like the Loudons, Dorothea wishes to build better cottages in order to harmonize the rural hierarchy between landowner and tenants – "to make the life of poverty beautiful" with attractive, well-built cottages that will inspire "duties and affections" but

it is her personal experience of the cottager's home lives, the text suggests, that authorizes her desires. While landowners like her uncle associate her cottage visiting with an eccentric religiosity, the socially-conscious reader sees the value of "A young lady of some birth and fortune, who knelt suddenly down on the floor by the side of a sick labourer and prayed fervently as if she thought herself living in the time of the Apostles" (3).

Dorothea sincerely engages in the day-to-day details of landscape husbandry, a practice that takes into account individual skills and interests while extending her means for social influence. For example, finding that she has a spare hour before dinner with the Farebrother family,

She paused on her way back to talk to old master Bunney who was putting in some garden-seeds, and discoursed wisely with that rural sage about the crops that would make the most return on the perch of ground, and the result of sixty years' experience as to soils—namely, that if your soil was pretty mellow it would do, but if there came wet, wet, wet, to make it all of a mummy, why then---. (483)

The epigraph for this chapter is a quotation from Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty," which in Eliot's narrative represents Dorothea's strength of character, her ability to get along in a non-patronizing way with her workers and tenants, and her interest in the welfare of the estate's inhabitants rather than the appearance or productivity of the estate per se. In contrast with her uncle's paper liberalism and neglect of his tenants, Dorothea's desire to improve the estate is figured an extension of her own "duties and affections," as a woman concerned with the happiness and domestic comforts of others. Most significant, however, is the heroine's emphasis on landscape management and its ideological importance: Dorothea exhibits a deeply moralized aesthetic that seeks to reunite beauty and moral action in cottage architecture.

However, her plans for improvement do not just include domestic architectural concerns, for she advocates scientific experimentation made popular in agricultural journals of the period. Indeed, the text suggests that Sir James Chettam reads "Agricultural Chemistry" in order to please Dorothea, a personal desire that nevertheless benefits his land and his tenants. Responding to Mr. Brooke's dismissal of Chettam's investments in agricultural improvement as "fancy-farming," Dorothea declares, "Surely . . . It is better to spend money in finding out how men can make the most of the land which supports them all, than in keeping dogs and horses only to gallop over it" (9). Sir James Chettam serves as an example of women's potential guiding influence on estate improvement and class reconciliation, for it is not just cottagers who need reforming but also their landlords.

Finally, in addition to privileging Dorothea's more local sympathetic landscaping over irresponsibly picturesque landscaping, the novel also distinguishes between superior and inferior types of femininity. In contrast with Dorothea who is active in the outdoors, an avid horsewoman who loves brisk walks and enjoys "the fresh air and the various aspects of the country," Rosamond and Dorothea are associated with an artificial picturesque tradition, one that also situates women as static or ornamental figures in the landscape rather than active participants. Eliot employs the sentimental language of flowers to mock Sir James's transfer of affection from Dorothea to Celia to the latter's more conventionally feminine preference for geraniums, which symbolizes her more wifely docility (61).

The novel also mocks men like Lydgate's picturesque view of women's docility that both obscures their agency and masks feminine materialism. For example, Lydgate's

false perception of Rosamond as a selfless wife is emphasized through the metaphor of landscape when he “[finds] it delightful to be listened to by a creature who would bring him the sweetest furtherance of satisfying affection—beauty—repose—such help as our thoughts get from the summer sky and the flower-fringed meadows” (245). Indeed, the novel repeatedly compares Rosamond to a carefully cultivated hot-house flower, who claims to be “a raw country girl,” but successfully uses feminine artifice to attract Lydgate, who admires “how lovely this creature was, her garment seeming to be made out of the faintest blue sky, herself so immaculately blond, as if the petals of some gigantic flower had just opened and disclosed her” (109). While Celia cultivates a frivolous, picturesque image of femininity, Eliot exposes Celia’s picturesque ideals of marriage as well. On her initial visit to Lowick on the eve of her sister’s marriage to Casaubon, Celia prefers the more cheerful, verdant layout of Sir James’ Freshitt Hall, which appeals to Celia’s “light young feminine tastes:”

“Oh dear!” Celia said to herself, “I am sure Freshitt Hall would have been pleasanter than this.” She thought of the white freestone, the pillared portico, and the terrace full of flowers, Sir James smiling above them like a prince, issuing from his enchantment in a rose-bush, with a handkerchief swiftly metamorphosed from the most delicately-odorous petals. (49)

Unlike Celia or Rosamond Vincy who are often contentedly framed by comfortable parlours, Dorothea’s superior womanhood is reflected in her healthy, naturalized relationship to Nature and landscape.

Despite Dorothea’s capacity for cultivating social relations, she is hindered by an inflexible patriarchal system that overlooks her worth. In contrast to Mr. Brooke, Caleb Garth, the practical middle-class land steward, embodies the characteristics of the gardenesque landscaper in masculine form, and does what she is unable to do because of patriarchal restrictions. Managing rural labor and resistance effectively, his characters



shows both what Dorothea cannot do because of her gender and what she might do if social conventions were more flexible for women (as they proved in real life to be in Octavia Hill's urban philanthropy). Eliot figures the threat of a disgruntled, potentially violent rural work force later in the novel as well. The rural laborers who live in Frick, a remote village of Lowick Parish, resist the construction of the railways and its disruption of the landscape, "where the cattle had hitherto grazed in a peace unbroken by astonishment" (381). At this point in the novel, Dorothea has convinced her uncle to rehire Garth as overseer of Tipton Grange, and has enlisted him to manage her Lowick estate as well. Significantly, Caleb Garth, the industrious land steward many critics claim to have been modeled after Eliot's father, embodies Ruskinian ideals of work and industry, and employs these masculine ideals in the improvement of several Middlemarch estates, but with the added sympathy for the social Eliot believes is missing in British social reform and culture:

Caleb Garth often shook his head in meditation on the value, the indispensable might of that myriad-headed, myriad-handed labour by which the social body is fed, clothed, and housed. It had laid hold of his imagination in boyhood. The echoes of the great hammer where roof or keel were a-making . . . the precision and variety of muscular effort wherever exact work had to be turned out. (173)

Thus, Eliot resolves class conflict through the character of Caleb Garth, whose love of work, and "the skillful application of labor," (381) bridges the gap between the landowner's interests and the laborers with whom he shares "a strong sense of fellowship" (385). However, Eliot's resolution is a shaky one, for Caleb Garth's fellowship is overshadowed by the class and legal interests and institutions for whom he speaks, and the coerciveness of his speech: "The law gives those men leave to come here on the land. And if you go fighting against it . . . you'll have to do with the constable and Justice Blakesley, and with the handcuffs and Middlemarch jail" (386).

Caleb Garth smooths over the anxieties surrounding rural unrest and a potentially disruptive rural work force, but, at the same time, signals Dorothea's distancing from these relations. In this same chapter, Garth, in a private conversation with his wife, repeats Dorothea's social ideals:

Most uncommon!' repeated Caleb. "She said a thing I often used to think myself when I was a lad: 'Mr. Garth, I should like to feel, if I lived to be old, that I had improved a great piece of land and built a great many cottages, because the work is of a healthy kind while it is being done, men are the better for it.' Those were the very words: she sees into things in that way." (381)

Caleb Garth's repetition of Dorothea's belief in the moral and spiritual health of work and domestic improvement subtly reflects her gendered alienation from landscape husbandry; ironically, Garth's quotations enfold Dorothea's words at a point in the novel in which she has been distanced from any active role in the landscape that she inhabits, and the rights of ownership such agency would imply. His appropriation of her words reasserts the initiative of a particular class and its desire to turn the commons into private property and profit, a class that enlists Caleb Garth's "muscular" intelligence and expertise.

To conclude, Eliot's *Middlemarch* ultimately privileges landscape in terms of local geography and its relationships, a focus that rejects the oversentimentalized reproductions of rural life for the interior, reclusive leisure of irresponsible landlords and a multitude of bourgeoisie consumers alike. Dorothea's relationship to representations of the countryside in *Middlemarch* can also contribute to cultural and historical studies of landscape in the contexts of nineteenth-century national identity and class conflict. Ruskin and Eliot, preceded and no doubt influenced by the Loudons, are wary of the very same dangers inherent in the dissemination of rural landscape to a growing class of consumers, anxious about distinguishing between the sugar-coated, popular reproductions

of stock English scenes and characters and more sober representations of a way of life they considered both attractive and problematic. For ultimately, the more abstract, classical discourse of sympathy that Ruskin articulates as an art historian and cultural critic overlaps with and is indeed subsumed by a sentimentalized conception of women's natural domestic sympathies. In the face of an intensive public debate and the increased visibility of urban and rural distress detailed in both condition of England literature, governmental blue book reports, and detailed narratives of urban poverty, landscape imagery that aestheticized poverty could no longer hold water in more sensitive Liberal circles.

Ruskin shunned what he saw as a modern world corrupted by competition and selfish individualism and longed for a return to abstract feudal social ideals of work, honor, and duty, an attitude that can be traced in *Middlemarch's* focus on a provincial society on the eve of Reform and its anxieties about working-class consciousness and class tensions. Indeed, these sentiments were typical of many Victorian figures, conservative liberals from Disraeli and Carlyle to Ruskin and Eliot who believed in gradual reform in the form of an enlightened paternalism, in which sympathetic individuals would intervene and educate the working classes according to middle-class ideals of work, duty, and domestic sensibilities.

This chapter shows how this tradition of the gardenesque contributes to a more refined understanding of Eliot's social vision by identifying the novelist's participation in an ideology of taste stewarded and practiced by women as well as her revisioning and extension of a masculine tradition of landscape aesthetics. George Eliot uses the pastoral setting of provincial life as a literary representation of the English countryside, one that

looks backwards to a mythologized rural landscape that supported a harmonious social hierarchy of responsible landlords and industrious tenants, and forward to a world where this reciprocity has become all the more tenuous in an increasingly industrialized, urban culture driven by capitalist forces and class competition.

As novelists and intellectuals of her period seem to repeatedly explore and debate, from Dickens, to Gaskell, Eliot, and Ruskin, women play a crucial, albeit ambiguous and contradictory role in negotiating the turbulence of nineteenth-century culture and articulating a national English identity in the midst of class diversification and tensions. Distinct, however, in some women's writers and men concerned with women's social role, is an insistence on the female gender's specific placement in the domestic sphere, and their role as inscapers, individuals whose localized experience of the everyday, the quotidian details of private life and their requisite care of others within the context of the Victorian family and bourgeois domesticity, enables a more humanized, and, paradoxically, more effective vision of culture that obscures the boundaries between private and public life, the rural and the urban, making them managers of class relations who foster a more harmonious, productive national landscape.

George Eliot ultimately redefines Ruskin's moralized concept of the picturesque in her *Middlemarch* heroine, Dorothea Brooke, by emphasizing a local, feminine vision of landscape. While Ruskin invokes the potential public effects of women's sympathy, Eliot takes this romantic notion a step further in both genre and orientation. Through the genre of narrative, an ostensibly feminine form of writing with its focus on the interior lives of individuals in terms of domestic spaces, experiences, and relationships, Eliot makes the individual woman's experience of domestic relations the index for

reconceiving the social import of and appreciation for exterior landscapes and aesthetics. Dorothea's experience of landscape exemplifies women's inscaping, the appropriation of landscape and "Nature" in terms of and for the purposes of improving domestic life. Eliot's inscaping reflects a more general desire of middle-class women to create a more fluid domestic sphere as well as disseminating an ideology of the gardenesque to the working classes.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> George Eliot, *Felix Holt: The Radical* (1866), ed. Lynda Mugglestone, London: Penguin, 1995, 49.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973, 120.

<sup>3</sup> All in-text citations from George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, ed. Bert G. Hornback, Norton Critical Edition, 1977.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Loesberg, "Aesthetics, Ethics, and Unreadable Acts in George Eliot," *Knowing the Past: Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Suzy Anger, Cornell University Press, 2001, 122.

<sup>5</sup> For examinations of Eliot's contradictory feminist impulses see Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's chapter on Eliot in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, and Alison Booth's *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> In *Sesame and Lilies*, essential to Ruskin's romantic image of nurturing womanhood is the garden itself and its metonymic relationship to the home that protects, nurses, and restores others who lie beyond landscaped suburban enclaves, while "far in the darkness of the terrible streets, these feeble florets are lying, with all their fresh leaves torn and their stems broken" (137).

<sup>7</sup> In "The Moral of Landscape," Ruskin makes the following distinction between types of moral being and perception: "Observe, then: we have, among mankind in general, the three orders of being; --the lowest, sordid and selfish, which neither sees nor feels; the second, noble and sympathetic, but which sees and feels without concluding or acting; the third and highest, which loses sight in resolution, and feeling in work." *The Works of*

John Ruskin, ed. Cook and Wedderburn Library Edition VIII, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 361. All following references to Ruskin from this edition.

<sup>8</sup> While Ruskin's picturesque hierarchy does not reference Loudon's mediating gardenesque, nevertheless, his career began in the pages of Loudon's *Architectural Magazine* and *The Gardener's Magazine*, unusual periodicals in their focus on social reform as essential to a healthier nation that could nurture a productive, green domestic sphere.

<sup>9</sup> From the introduction to the second printing of his *An Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture* (1846) where Loudon claimed his objective was to serve "the purpose of educating young persons in architecture as an art of taste, especially those of the female sex" (1).

<sup>10</sup> John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, London: Henry Altemus, 1871, 119.

<sup>11</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, 156.

<sup>12</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, 164. See the following passage as well: "And, . . . what the woman is to be within her gates, as the centre of order, the balm of distress, and the mirror of beauty, that she is also to be without her gates, where order is more difficult, distress more imminent, loveliness more rare" (157).

<sup>13</sup> Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, 165.

<sup>14</sup> In her essay, "The Natural History of German Life" (1856), Eliot posits sympathy in rural representation as an essential source of class reconciliation: "The greatest benefit that we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves which may be called the raw material of human sentiment. When Scott takes us into Luckie Mucklebackit's cottage, or tells us the story of "The Two Drovers," when Wordsworth sings us the reverie of "Poor Susan" . . . more is being done towards linking the higher classes with the lower, towards obliterating the vulgarity of exclusiveness, than a hundred sermons or philosophical dissertations," in *Middlemarch*, Norton Critical Edition, 2000, 520.

<sup>15</sup> George Ford, "Felicitous Space: the Cottage Controversy," *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. U.C. Knoepfelmacher and G.B. Tennyson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, 29-37.

## CHAPTER 6

### "BRINGING BEAUTY HOME TO THE POOR": OCTAVIA HILL, THE GARDENESQUE, AND THE DOMESTICATION OF THE METROPOLIS

"—[If] London is as utterly doomed as Gomorrah, that is no reason why you should not open a window, or bring a field to give a moment longer breath to her plague-stricken children, but I have to labour wholly to fence round fresh fields beyond the smoke of her torment."

--Letter from John Ruskin to Octavia Hill, July 1875<sup>1</sup>

"Let us hope that when we have secured our drainage, our cubic space of air, our water on every floor, we may have time to live in our homes, to think how to make them pretty, each in our own way, and to let the individual characteristics they take from our life in them to be all good as well as healthy and beautiful, because all human work and life were surely meant to be like all Divine creations, lovely as well as good."

--Octavia Hill, 1891<sup>2</sup>

Octavia Hill's use of the garden in her urban-centered philanthropy exemplifies women's successful domestication of landscape in the promotion and extension of middle-class women's subjectivity to the social sphere in the nineteenth century. In particular, her use of landscape to domesticate the cityscape and the London working classes indicates the ideological power of gardenesque taste and women's ability to use it not just in fiction and more suburban and rural spaces, but in the metropolis itself by the end of the nineteenth century. While Ruskin, like many Victorians, perceived the commercial aspects, the pollution, the congestion of people and the rapid pace of the city as anathema to the civilizing beauty of Nature and landscape, Hill departs from the binary of urban and rural space, treating landscape as a taste that middle-class women like herself could bring into the city as a means for urban renewal and to quell urban unrest.

Thus, Hill's application of the gardenesque in nearly all aspects of her philanthropy suggests the degree to which middle-class women made landscape a feminine aesthetic to be used to extend their role as cultivators of British culture. While landscape is still conceived as a primarily masculine aesthetic in cultural studies of British identity, Hill's gardenesque style of philanthropy underscores the existence of an alternate discourse that women used to extend their public and professional roles.

Octavia Hill, who began her specific brand of housing improvement in London in 1864 with Ruskin's financial backing, is of course a well-known figure in histories of urban housing as well as studies of nineteenth-century British women's philanthropy. A formidable presence in London housing reform, she promoted a localized form of philanthropy, by buying, cleaning, and renovating some of East London's worst slums, and then assigning "landladies," usually middle-class reform-minded women like herself, to oversee the properties and collect rents (which she was very strict about). Her real mission was to establish trust "through sympathy with their distresses," intimacy that would reform the residents as well.<sup>3</sup>

However, her daily experience of the courts she managed made her acutely aware of space, air, and color as rare, yet essential commodities; from the outset, therefore, she sought properties that might accommodate gardens or yard space. Realizing the city's limitations for cultivating a cottage ideal, she looked to the cityscape itself for the amenities of the suburban garden, successfully securing abandoned cemeteries and surrounding commons like Hampstead Heath, Parliament Hill, and Hilly Fields threatened by development. Using the language of the domestic interior, she believed "outdoor sitting-rooms," could provide the exhausted city-dweller with the benefits of



solace and reflection, qualities essential to middle-class notions of individualism, and not incidentally, qualities associated with the middle-class private, domestic garden.<sup>4</sup> Hill's gardenesque aesthetic had profound national effects as well; her Open Spaces movement, intended to secure England's countryside specifically for the working classes' improvement, led to her co-founding of the National Trust in 1895.

As Chapter 3's detailing of the Loudons' ideological stakes in a home and garden aesthetic foregrounds, Victorian gardening provided the middle classes with a space and discourse to negotiate and, to an extent, obscure the boundaries of city and country. An aesthetic category that encompassed not just a taste for beauty in Nature and the rural, the gardenesque situated the home itself as the place for the rational pleasures of a new era, and ultimately defined the Victorian household as a productive and permeable space for assimilating an expanding international economy and industrialization. In terms of Victorian gender politics, Jane Loudon's blending of fictional narrative and practical sciences adapted for the domestic sphere opened the door for middle-class women to physically work in the garden itself as well as extend gardenesque values to urban space through a tutelary relationship to the working classes. Picking up where Jane Loudon's popularizing of gardening as the genteel, rational woman's pursuit in the 1840's and 50's left off, Octavia Hill's philanthropy takes the country to the city in the latter part of the century.

This chapter will explore how Hill's gardenesque sensibility frames her approach to reform and how this mission is manifested in the city both indoors and outdoors. Like Margaret Hale, Elizabeth Gaskell's heroine in *North and South* (1855) whose rural childhood enables her to bring a "breath of country air, somehow" to the fictional

industrial town of Milton that heals class conflict, Octavia Hill's rural tastes, according to her letters and contemporaries, provide her with the constitution to take on the city and its suffering.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, she approached landscape as a medium that could be abstracted and adapted to the city for the physical and moral rehabilitation of London's poorest residents, people whose mental and physical health, she believed, had been compromised by the cramped, unsanitary conditions and stresses of urban life. Thus, the four-year-old Octavia who proclaimed she would "like to have a field so large that she could run about in it for ever," and adored a box full of silks for their vibrant colors, would labor as a mature woman and philanthropist to bring "space" and "color" to the working classes.<sup>6</sup>

While historians and scholars of British nineteenth-century social history and women's studies like Gillian Darley, Nancy Boyd have recognized Hill as an influential figure in housing reform, and an exemplary Victorian activist, her open spaces work has often been subsumed in these examinations as a "natural extension" of her housing work.<sup>7</sup> Gillian Darley has provocatively referred to her work with the Kyrle Society, the group that initiated her early open spaces work, as one of "picturesque missions," in which the Society's members sought not just "preservation," but the "gift and purchase and beautifying" of garden spots and indoor renovations of hospitals and meeting halls for the improvement of urban life.<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, cultural historians like Martin Gaskell and H.L. Malchow have classified Hill's Open Spaces work and philosophy as part of a 19<sup>th</sup> century public parks movement that reflected bourgeois attempts to control working-class leisure time and space.<sup>9</sup> If, according to F.M.L Thompson, open space enthusiasts like Hill were responding to a broad-based fear of working class violence, of the dangerous massing of an urban proletariat, they were also seeking to mollify class dissent

according to a model that engaged Victorian assumptions about middle-class female gentility/subjectivity and an increasingly powerful yoking of the garden and the domestic sphere.<sup>10</sup>

Hill became a landlady for the first time with Ruskin's financial backing in 1865; by the end of her life in 1912 it is estimated that she and her fellow workers were responsible for more than 10,000 people.<sup>11</sup> Despite her formidable influence on one of the most prominent branches of Victorian philanthropy, Octavia Hill has nevertheless been treated as a relatively conservative figure in studies of the late Victorian era. Indeed, she seems to have successfully shrouded her public image in feminine modesty and moral duty during her lifetime, convincing male philanthropists, donors, and statesmen to support her philanthropic methods with her practical emphasis on gradual improvement. Not surprisingly, social historians like John Nelson Tarn have minimized the cultural significance of her work, arguing that "her efforts were palliatives," that merely postponed the more large-scale effects of municipal housing.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, historians have criticized the strong moral bent of her philanthropy or what, as Robert Whelan has put it, her "horror for careless charity."<sup>13</sup> While her housing reform always began with material improvements—cleaning, repairs, and better sanitation—her real passion lay in transforming the her tenants' domestic habits through the sympathetic involvement and local influence of women like herself. Indeed, she often referred to her tenants as "my people," with whom she felt a "landed proprietor's" relationship and responsibility.<sup>14</sup> Yet, her insistence on limiting "relief" to encourage individual responsibility and self-reliance, her rejection of housing subsidies while managing to materially improve the lives of thousands of Londoners, was typical of Victorian

philanthropy's attitudes to the poor, including its largest institution, the Charity Organization Society, to which Hill contributed substantially.

Critical histories like F.K. Prochaska's have examined how middle-class ideologies of femininity and domesticity shaped women's interventions in social reform. Similarly, Mary Poovey has examined the class and gender politics of nineteenth-century women's philanthropy and sanitary reform. She has argued that nineteenth-century women employed a feminine, personal style of reform associated with their domestic duties to counter what was perceived by a as the dehumanizing effects of masculine, abstract approaches to improvement. Octavia Hill's insistence on the benefits of women's sympathetic influence in local contexts was a successful method, undoubtedly, for she was, by the turn of the century, responsible for supervising thousands of London homes. Nor was her influence limited to the metropolis. With the 1875 publication and eventual translation of her *Homes of the London Poor*, her feminine methodology of reform was adopted by women philanthropists and charity institutions on an international scale.

Nevertheless, interpreters of Hill's cultural impact have generally admired her active public life and influence and while apologizing for or lamenting what appears to contemporary eyes as a patronizing approach to reform. As Hill's Preface to the first edition of her collected essays of 1875, *Homes of the London Poor*, baldly states:

The people's homes are bad, partly because they are badly built and arranged; they are tenfold worse because the tenants' habits and lives are what they are. Transplant them to-morrow to healthy commodious homes, and they would pollute and destroy them. There needs, and will need for some time, a reformatory work which will demand that loving zeal of individuals which cannot be had for money, and cannot be legislated for by Parliament.<sup>15</sup>

Hill demonstrates in writings like this a clear moral hierarchy between "lady" volunteers and their working-class tenants. Equating moral health with domestic order, a pervasive

middle-class assumption, Hill's "loving zeal" was a principle of her social work that, even as it intended to improve the living conditions of the poor through intimacy and personal relationships, also secured social distance between "lady" and tenant.

In addition to assessing Octavia Hill in terms of later twentieth-century categories of gender and class politics, of radicalism and conservatism, historical treatment of Hill's work has also consistently associated her philanthropy, and the late nineteenth-century public parks movement, with the "powerful antagonistic dichotomies" of town and country.<sup>16</sup> For example, H.L. Malchow has argued that the public parks movement and Octavia Hill's work reflected a nostalgic transplanting of the pastoral ideal, and that reformers were motivated by anti-urban sentiment. While the Arcadian ideal no doubt provided an appealing image for Victorian urban dwellers, however, gardening as a middle-class profession and popular pursuit was a much more complex, productive cultural medium than the traditional polarities of town and country, urban and rural suggest, for it legitimized women's role in and relationship to public and political life by strengthening and extending their feminization of the domestic sphere.

More to the point, S. Martin Gaskell has linked the nineteenth-century public parks movement to middle-class beliefs in the virtue of industry as a cure for working class idleness and vice, in which the garden became "a means of conscious control and education in the ethics of an industrial order."<sup>17</sup> While rightly identifying middle-class reformers' use of the garden as a significant aspect of housing reform and a means to manage working class leisure time, Gaskell does not recognize the gendered implications of Octavia Hill's politics of space or middle-class women's association with and cultivation of a gardening culture over the long nineteenth century. Furthermore, his

critique does not recognize middle-class women's role as custodians of the English landscape nor their adoption of a pre-industrial pattern of land use and class relations in their tutelary relationship to the poor.

As Pamela Gilbert has argued in her reappraisal of Habermas and Mary Poovey's notion of "the social" as a feminized domain for engaging and shaping the discourse of public debates and concerns, women take a maternalist approach to housing reform and social work.<sup>18</sup> Hill and her fellow workers believed they were more effective at improving urban housing because of their domestic expertise; their intimate knowledge of the home made them superior readers of character, and therefore better able to manage the proper distribution of charity and aid to the most needy recipients as well as those most open to middle-class conceptions of moral improvement. Thus, bourgeois women's association with a healthy domestic sphere where sympathy and feeling were played out in a personal, local fashion defined their movement and entry into working-class areas of the city as a natural extension of their feminine, maternal duties. By collecting rents while observing domestic habits, Hill and her landladies wished to encourage working class families to pursue individual tastes and expression, albeit within the range of an acceptable, i.e. middle-class, rubric.

As I have argued over the course of this project, the middle-class appropriation of the garden also heralded an expression of taste specific to women, which they cultivated as a means to extend their domestic expertise into broader cultural and social milieus. Approaching Octavia Hill's philanthropy in terms of a maternal definition of social relations also highlights the role of the gardenesque, or, rather, a domestic sphere that was anchored in tradition of landscape stewarded by middle-class women. That is, for

Hill, landscape and gardening would have seemed the most amiable mediums for inculcating middle class ideals of individualism and self-help because of the garden's long nineteenth-century association with women's domestic role. If Victorians understood the domestic sphere as a place to resolve or escape fears and anxieties about urbanism and industrialization, it is logical to extend this mollifying force to the garden. Yet the garden was also the site for middle class women's cultivation of subjectivity, and the arena for exhibiting the domestic woman's skills and sympathy, qualities that many believed were also needed to provide relief and restoration to an ailing society. However, scholars have not explored the degree to which a middle-class appropriation of landscape aesthetics influenced Hill's social vision and philanthropic endeavors, nor the extent to which the garden played a crucial role in her own self-fashioning and feminine identity.

While it is easy to categorize her work in the terms of women policing the patriarchy, or of their complicity with the Victorian status quo, such treatment obscures her creative appropriation of a landscape tradition, one of the most powerful cultural discourses of British culture. As this chapter will show, Octavia Hill's employment of the rural estate, a system of "mutual ties" between landlord and tenant, as a model for intervention in the more public sphere of social reform was not simply a nostalgic projection of middle-class desire. Rather, it was the creative extension of a long, complex tradition of middle-class women's ideological investment in landscape and the association of the country with a healthy domestic sphere.

Florence Nightingale's reaction to George Eliot's reform-minded protagonist, Dorothea Brooke, in *Middlemarch* is indicative of the degree to which many women with a public voice, whether in literature or social work, were invested in the aesthetic and

social value of a moralized landscape. Still, when the idealistic planner of cottage architecture who wishes to make "poverty beautiful," leaves her provincial home for London, Dorothea becomes immersed in her husband's political career, and her mission to improve the lives of the poor in her uncle's parish is left unfulfilled. Taking issue with Eliot's suggested conclusion that women's broader cultural influence must be subsumed by the more private, properly feminine channel of a companionate marriage, Nightingale believed Octavia Hill to be a living example of a woman, "who had managed to make her ideal very real indeed:"

This author can find no better outlet for the heroine . . . than to marry an elderly sort of literary imposter, and, quick after him, his relation, a baby sort of itinerant Cluricaune (see *Irish Fairies*) or inferior Faun (see Hawthorne's matchless *Transformation*). Yet close at hand was a woman—an Idealist too—and if we mistake not, a connection of the author's, who had managed to make her ideal very real indeed. By taking charge of blocks of buildings in poorest London, while making herself rent collector, she brought sympathy and education to bear from individual to individual . . . Could not the heroine 'the sweet, sad, enthusiast', have been set to some work such as this?<sup>19</sup>

Like the fictional reformer Dorothea, Hill sought to improve the domestic lives of the working classes and the poor through principles of landscape but in an ailing urban rather than a provincial setting.<sup>20</sup>

Nightingale's comparison of Eliot's protagonist to Octavia Hill underscores women's appropriation of rural life and landscape, but for the purposes of rejuvenating and domesticating urban space. If Hill's philanthropy recalls a patriarchal tradition of estate proprietorship, however, she deems women best suited to apply or invoke the sympathetic, more reciprocal class relations associated with the pre-industrial ideal. Octavia Hill makes the ideological importance of the estate system for the city clear in her 1871 essay, "Landlords and Tenants:" "The old word "landlord" is a proud one to many an English gentleman, who holds dominion over the neat cottage, with its well-



stocked garden; over the comfortable farm-house; over broad, sloping parks, and rich farmlands.”<sup>21</sup> Her explanation of the connotations of the English “landlord” emphasizes the fruits of production, wealth, and property associated with land overseen by the proprietor’s sympathetic management. She then contrasts this rural economy with the urban, identifying a new form of wealth and property not in land *per se* but in the social sphere of the working classes and their home life:

But where are the owners, or lords, or ladies, of most courts like that in which I stood with my two fellow-workers? Who holds dominion there? Who heads the tenants there? If any among the nobly born, or better educated, own them, do they bear the mark of their hands? . . . There are in those courts as loyal English hearts as ever loved or revered the squire in the village, only they have been so forgotten. Dark under the level ground, in kitchens damp with foulest moisture, there they huddle in multitudes, and no one loves them or raises them.<sup>22</sup>

While the early nineteenth century, as Beth Tobin has argued, was a period in which the middle classes rhetorically attacked the English landlord’s neglect of the countryside and rural labor, Hill emphasizes the absence of “owners, or lords, or ladies” and the inability of “overworked clergyman” – “they count their flock by the thousands, and these people want watching one by one”--to meet the pressing needs of an urban workforce in the latter half of the century.<sup>23</sup> For Hill, London’s homes and courts become the metaphorically fertile ground, not for agricultural wealth or the accumulation of property, but for the cultivation of individualized souls.

In her “Landlords” essay, Hill also claims that middle-class “landladies,” with their sympathetic expertise in domestic affairs and local influence, are best suited for establishing the “relation between landlord and tenant” in an urban environment.<sup>24</sup> Her appropriation of the rural estate signals the need for middle-class women volunteers to be given their due in the changing, and, what she deems, a “wild” urban landscape.<sup>25</sup> If the “landlord” is a figure of the past, it is women like herself, Hill implies, who are capable

of producing a more healthy urban life in the present. Women's calling and place was the city, Hill would repeatedly insist in her essays and letters, not an idyllic landscape or suburban garden. Instead of serving merely as escapes from urbanization and industrialization, the suburban garden and rural landscape become sites where women like Hill to extract aesthetic values that define middle-class identity and domesticity, cultural resources they use to extend their influence in the public sphere.

Thus, the Englishman's tradition of landscaping the countryside is displaced by what women posit as their more effective inscaping of the city's courts and poorest residents' homes. Hill locates her expertise in the details of domestic work, in which "infinitesimally small actions" produce gradual but remarkable results.<sup>26</sup> In this same essay, she provides a history of her work in Marylebone, a narrative of inscaping in which her "principles of government" are "worked out in the course of practical dealings with individual cases."<sup>27</sup> Closely resembling Elizabeth Hamilton's early nineteenth-century narrative of domestic reform, Octavia Hill describes the initial resistance to her plans (to what many late nineteenth-century city dwellers must have felt to be an intrusion) and their eventual acceptance of their landlady's supervision, in which locked doors give way to polite invitations:

The sense of quiet power and sympathy soon made itself felt, and less and less was there any sign of rudeness or violence towards ourselves. Even before the first winter was over many a one would hurry to light us up the stairs, and instead of having my rent-book and money thrust to me through the half-open door, and being kept from possible entrance by a firmly planted foot, my reception would be, "Oh, can't you come in, Miss, and sit down for a bit?"<sup>28</sup>

Embedded in such descriptions is her belief in the positive, morally beneficial effects of the middle-class woman's presence, which, she suggests, eventually permeates the rooms of the buildings she moves through and oversees. This assumption is reflected in her

spatial treatment of the buildings themselves, where she designates the stairs and passages to be the "landlady's portion." Often enlisting her tenants' elder girls, Hill insisted that these areas be scrubbed and "made models of cleanliness," "for I knew from former experience that the example of this would, in time, silently spread itself to the rooms themselves."<sup>29</sup> As this chapter will later develop, her emphasis on the supervision of interior domestic space would increasingly extend outward. Hill would eventually look to the city and its surrounding fields and meadows to be made into protected, privatized spaces for the inculcation of domestic virtues like self-discipline and self-reliance.

While Hill intended for middle-class habits of cleanliness to "silently spread," she also wanted to disperse the seeds of individualism in the form of separate cottages, which could more likely include a garden. In her many published essays on housing reform and letters to her "fellow workers," Hill insisted on the value of the single cottage for the improvement of London's poor, though she rented such apartments because of their scarcity. Still, wary of London's movement towards tenement blocks as the cheapest and most efficient form of housing for the poor, she believed the moral value of small cottages lay in their separateness, their ability to incorporate or sustain the conventions of a respectable domesticity. Ideally, she thought the cottage best accommodated the individual needs and habits of tenants by encouraging self-sufficiency and domestic health that could be displayed in and extended to its exterior space or yard, however small. In the following passage, Hill sees the development of individual identity in the expansion of domestic space to the garden, and its suggestion of a productive private sphere:

Go down one of the courts of cottages which still linger in parts of London, pass through one of the passages and glance along the small back yards; in one you will

see plants and creepers carefully trained, in another rabbits, in a third a little shed for wood, in a fourth all the laundry arrangements well provided, in a fifth the little delicate child sits unmolested, in nearly all some evidence that the man has something to work at and improve when he comes home.<sup>30</sup>

For Hill, "The place has the capacity of being a home, not a couple of barrack-like rooms," because the spatial configuration of the individual cottage reflects and reinforces the tenants' pursuit of autonomy and self-sufficiency through the activities of gardening and animal husbandry and the provision of a safe, outdoor space for the child.<sup>31</sup> In the block system, Hill writes, "even the perambulator may be a difficulty, pets are impossible, even the nail for the funeral card or photograph of the son in Egypt, must be put, if at all, on the picture rail, thus inhibiting "the power of developing the individual life."<sup>32</sup> In contrast, "the separate house, or the small house, gives scope" for the pursuit of an individual life through the cultivation of a gardenesque aesthetic.<sup>33</sup>

Just as the garden was believed to extend the domestic health of the poor's home, so too did it extend the space for Hill and her trainees' sympathetic mode of supervision. In contrast with the block system, which limited the lady visitor's encouragement of self-reliance and order of individual households, the single cottage further enabled "personal involvement" and the individual attention Hill believed to be the moral basis for responsible charity. In contrast, the block tenement's monotonous layout and opaqueness, the lack of discrete separate households for cultivating privacy, work against individual difference as well as the development of "individual taste," a prerequisite of middle-class subjectivity.<sup>34</sup>

Hill's preference for the free-standing cottage was also influenced by her own remembrance of a happy childhood spent in the area of Finchley and Highgate and her love of gardening. Her passion for helping the poor was often expressed in tandem with

her longing for the countryside, the repose afforded by its vibrant color, fresh air, and open skies. She herself struggled to maintain the smallest elements of the countryside in the city for her own domestic comfort. Lamenting that “Spring is hard to bear in London,” in an early letter to Miranda, Hill describes the tending of a vine in her bedroom, which symbolizes her experience of displacement in the city, and a desire to cultivate a safe space for her mother and sisters within it:

By the way, the dear, lovely Virginian creeper, nursed tenderly in my bedroom until now, was brought down today for its home to be fixed. I wanted to put it in fifty places: Mamma’s quiet room, our little sanctum, seems to want it so much, trained round the window, and every one of the walls round the leads upon which we looked cried out for it, so did the railing near them, and yet one would have liked to place it in front, where it would gladden the eyes of passers-by, and I so wanted it where it would greet me every morning, round the bars for plants outside my window, the dear thing with its tender long shoots and leaves so full of promise.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, while her own domestic happiness depended on nurturing elements of landscape and the garden, so too did she believe in the psychological benefits for her tenants. The cottage ideal, therefore, was the most fulfilling form of housing for Hill because it could best incorporate a gardenesque aesthetic, a home life that could accommodate the elements of nature and landscape required for domestic happiness. While the block tenement often precluded “the little separate yard,” the cottage, with even the smallest strip of ground, could still host some Virginia creepers, for example, and remind the inhabitant of the freedom and solace of more open spaces.

“The girls who were always up in the hedges”: Narratives of Victorian Womanhood and the Making of the Lady Philanthropist

C. Edmund Maurice, Hill’s primary nineteenth-century biographer, has emphasized the role of the country in the philanthropist’s early development. His account attests to the fact that women’s feminine attachment to landscape and the outdoors had become a

familiar setting for literary constructions of female subjectivity in Victorian culture. His narrative of a virtuous womanhood fostered by the countryside begins with his account of Hill's mother, Caroline, who raised her daughters according to Rousseau's noble savage ideal, encouraging her daughters' early love for outdoor play and Nature. Despite her father, James Hill's, financial and emotional breakdown, Octavia's childhood is described as a happy and healthy one enjoyed in the country. Living modestly for several years in a cottage provided by their grandfather, the pioneering sanitary reformer Dr. Southwood Smith, Mrs. Hill and her daughters' lives during this period are portrayed as relatively carefree and bucolic.

Maurice's account figures the countryside countryside as an outdoor classroom or nursery for middle-class children by nurturing civic feeling and responsible individualism. For the biographer, the English countryside becomes the essential site for the cultivation of a formidable Victorian activist, a place that fostered Hill's "presence of mind" and "resourcefulness."<sup>36</sup> Known as "the girls who were always up in the hedges," bemused neighbors are reported to have seen them dancing wildly around rose bushes.<sup>37</sup> Drawing upon late eighteenth and early nineteenth century educational philosophers like Rousseau and Pestalozzi, Caroline Hill emphasized the freedom of open spaces and the value of exercise in her daughters' development. Maurice recounts several incidents at Finchley that portray Octavia as a passionate, adventurous child: saving her sister from drowning by crawling down an embankment and holding out a stick, falling from a high fence she had been climbing and subsequently "forbidden to do any lessons" for a time, leading ragged school children scarcely younger than herself on outdoor excursions.<sup>38</sup> As the last example attests, Hill's healthy, physical adventures in the country go hand-in-

hand with her development as an effective reformer and dedicated social activist in the city.

As Nancy Boyd observes in her comparative study of Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill, and Florence Nightingale, all three formidable female activists flourished in the absence of formal schooling, in which "You were given time to be alone, the discipline of family living, animals, sports, a beautiful countryside, lessons in history, classics, music, and geography offered by teachers who loved their subject and their student-daughters and sons."<sup>39</sup> I would like to emphasize that embedded in Boyd's account are the nineteenth-century principles of the gardenesque, virtues associated with a productive domestic sphere which celebrate the English countryside and the domestic garden as sites for moral development of the self, the inculcation of individualism, and the performance of civic duty.

Both biographical accounts and historical readings of Hill uncritically attribute middle-class woman's appreciation for and enjoyment of the countryside to moral virtue. For example, Maurice's narrative of the family's 1851 move to London where Mrs. Hill found work to support her family emphasizes the transition from country to city life and the family's preservation of an appreciation for rural pleasures and the countryside, qualities that buffer the shock of the city and its potentially contaminating effects on their femininity. Initially, Maurice portrays their transition to the city as a move from an idyllic existence to a mythic land of suffering and corruption: "The change from the healthy open-air life at Finchley, and from the beauty of the country to the ugliness of her new surroundings told heavily on her spirits; and this depression was increased by the sudden sense of the evil and misery in the world."<sup>40</sup>

The family's fond remembrance of their country upbringing undoubtedly helped them adapt to the pressures of urban life, providing them with a cultural resource for surviving economically while preserving their feminine identity. Their letters of this period show the Hill women rally and emphasize their swift immersion in the energetic social life of Christian Socialism and Guild work dedicated to alleviating urban poverty. Their cultural ties to the country, then, become the means for embracing the vocation of social work as well as alleviating their own suffering in their adjustment to London. According to Maurice, Hill's earliest experiment in social reform began at the age of fourteen. Placed in charge of the Guild's Ragged School children and their making of toy furniture, Hill she was soon managing the children's time off with trips to London's surrounding countryside, a practice that her family and friends fondly memorialized:

Her sister Gertrude remembers walking in Highgate Lane on a Spring afternoon with Professor Owen, who was quietly explaining something about the mosses on Lord Mansfield's fence—all being very still—when, to her surprise, the hedge was broken open, and with a burst of joy, who should leap down from the bank with a staff in her hand and a straw hat torn by the thicket but Octavia followed by a troop of ragged school workers, happy and flushed, each with a lap of blue-bells. Octavia stayed for a minute to speak to her sister and the Professor; then off they all went back into the wood and away towards Finchley.<sup>41</sup>

This account directly links Octavia's urban responsibilities with her love for the countryside. The record of her adolescent passion for leading a "troop" of working class children through the fields, in effect, displays her natural ability for leadership and foretells how her social mission and attitudes to the poor would be framed by a gardenesque aesthetic. Thus, the countryside that once served as a classroom for 'noble savages' becomes a space for middle-class ladies to inculcate a taste for healthy rural pleasures in the working classes' younger members. In this narrative of subjectivity, the Romantic conception of childhood and the formation of identity inherited from Rousseau



and Wordsworth is the cultural property of bourgeois individuals. In contrast, the ragged school children do not have access to an unmediated relationship to nature; rather, they must be taught these values by 'ladies' invested in a gardenesque tradition, like Hill herself.

### The Lady Philanthropist, Landscape, and Travel

While her early affinity for the countryside provides her with the physical and moral health needed to take on the city's social and economic challenges, landscape also served as a restorative for what most Victorians saw as woman's delicate physiology, one easily worn down by the hectic life and unhealthy air of the metropolis. Hill's friends and associates including Ruskin and Eliot, are known to have subsidized her leisure during periods of nervous or physical exhaustion. Like her mother, Caroline, they believed that travel was a chance for "retrospect and prospect," and assumed that Octavia's enjoyment of new landscapes would restore her physical and mental well being, indeed, her sense of self.<sup>42</sup> Women's travel and appreciation of landscape was thus believed by Hill and her contemporaries to be essential to her health and the continuation of her social mission.

In contrast with an earlier, aristocratic tradition of the picturesque, the gentleman tourist's appreciation for the rare and unusual, Hill's letters home privilege a working, peopled landscape over a romantic, or austere one. For example, during one trip through the French countryside, she delights in distinguishing herself from the typical tourist and the pursuit of "grander scenery," preferring to go "quite out of the beat of tourists and off the regular tracks, really near the lives and heart of the people."<sup>43</sup> Indeed, her enjoyment of the prospect is one that illuminates the domestic life of its people, in which "we see them in their chalets and gardens, and in upland fields bringing back their harvests."<sup>44</sup>

Travel not only restored her health and spirit; it also reinforced her interest in the garden as a site for social reform and her belief in the moral relationship between people and landscape. Her letters during her trips within the British Isles and on the Continent are filled with passionate descriptions of landscape and the people that inhabit these places. Ultimately, her skill in observing the cityscape in terms of domestic health and family life is reflected in her responses to the rural villages and landscapes through which she travels. While on a trip to the Continent in 1874, she again self-consciously distinguishes herself from the typical tourist when she observes that, "It is beautiful to see how much of the earth has to be filled with happy home life; and, near lovely things, *this* is not the impression one gets in England."<sup>45</sup> While in Germany, she sees well-made and populated parks that remind her of her mission at home, and she writes of how "still these gardens for the people everywhere look reproach on me."<sup>46</sup>

Her travels also brought her into contact with other women active in social work, experiences she associates with a feminine tendency to read landscape in terms of human relationships, in which to know the landscape is to "know the people." While travelling through the Balkans, for example, Octavia calls on the superior knowledge of the "missionary woman" when a gentleman who shares her boat refers to the local Servians as "all robbers and murderers."<sup>47</sup> She writes to her mother of the exchange, "I was glad to remember Miss Irby, and to be able to say a quiet word about knowing a lady who had worked among them for years; and that I did not believe she had found them such dreadful hardened people as he seemed to think. "Oh," he said, "she probably lives in one of the towns, and has a dragoman to intervene between her and the people." "No," I

replied, "I believe not; I think she has travelled all over the country, she is working about schools there, and, I fancy, knows the people."<sup>48</sup>

"The healing gift of space": Octavia Hill and the Domestication of Open Spaces in London

While John Loudon advertised the gardenesque as an aesthetic that could be adapted to the smallest of suburban spaces, suggesting any Victorian regardless of income could adopt the principles of the gardenesque in the privacy of her own home, Hill believed the aesthetic could be brought into and adapted to the smallest of spaces in the most crowded of cities. An affinity for the countryside, a developed awareness of the richness of English flora, and the importance of incorporating this aesthetic into home life frame Hill's distinction between the respectable and the recalcitrant poor. Attempting to alleviate middle-class anxiety about the working classes' increased mobility and access to the countryside and open spaces, Hill employs the English countryside as a means for inculcating middle-class individualism, and ascribes to it many of the same influences and effects of the bourgeois domestic sphere.

John Ruskin, perhaps the most influential figure in Hill's life beyond her mother and elder sister, Miranda, helped solidify her appreciation for landscape and art as sources for urban rejuvenation. Introduced to the scholar when she was a teenager, she was soon taken under his wing, and employed as a copyist of landscape masters like Turner for his *Modern Painters* series. As their letters reveal, Hill felt increasingly drawn to philanthropic work and more and more ill-suited to life as an artist. Yet, landscape as both an art form and a leisure activity were to remain a unifying thread in her piecemeal improvement of urban housing and domestic life. While Hill attributes the reformatory or moral benefits of the garden to Ruskin in her first project of housing reform, it was she

who remained committed to bringing the moral benefits of a gardenesque aesthetic to “the people.”<sup>49</sup>

While Ruskin did advocate the inclusion of gardens for the houses he purchased for Hill’s supervision, he was often disappointed with the results and reluctant to visit the sites of his philanthropic investments. Hence, his relegation of reform work to women, claiming, as he did in *Sesame and Lilies* that, “It is women’s work to go among strangers and bless them whenever called” reflects his own ambivalence about urban rejuvenation.<sup>50</sup> Hill’s mentor was wary of her desire to bring art and the pleasures of Nature to the working classes because he ultimately saw urban life as antithetical to the beauty and rejuvenating power of landscape. As this chapter’s epigraph suggests, the disillusioned scholar and critic of industrialization perceived more rigid boundaries between country and city than his pupil, and believed that art and Nature could not be successfully abstracted and contracted into urban forms

In contrast, Hill, who saw her mission as a distinctly urban one, approaches the “preservation” of the country in a more hybrid way, as qualities or essences that can be introduced and reproduced in the smallest of urban spaces—in terms of “color” “space” “light” and “quiet”—qualities also essential to a healthy domestic sphere.<sup>51</sup> Because of its adaptability and accessibility, the gardenesque is conceived as a feminine, interior aesthetic, yet its dissemination implies mobility and unconventional uses of Nature’s palette, and an artistic abstraction of the countryside virtues. Her participation in the Kyrle Society best illustrates her creative abstraction of the rural for the rejuvenation of urban social life. Initially conceived by her sister, Miranda, as a “Society for the Diffusion of Beauty,” the organization sought to improve the aesthetics of the city, to

revive and refresh its exhausted, cramped residents through the introduction of window boxes, the distribution of flowers, the production of murals, as well as the sponsorship of music and theatrical productions.<sup>52</sup> A rather revolutionary inversion of what Ruskin believed lay in the moral value of landscape painting by artists such as Turner, Hill's moral aesthetic sought to transform the city itself into a thoroughly modern landscape painting by introducing "color" and "music" and "space" throughout the metropolis.

As Gillian Darley has observed, Hill's participation in the Kyrle Society was "a natural extension of her housing work."<sup>53</sup> This connection is illustrated in Maurice's record of "a curious incident" that shows how Hill's urban housing work directed her interest in the open spaces movement:

A curious incident connected the Deptford work with another successful effort to save an open space. When visiting one of the tenants in Queen Street, Deptford, Octavia noticed a glass filled with flowers, and an enquiry found that they had been picked in a place known as "Hilly Fields." Octavia was struck with the name, followed up the clue, and eventually succeeded in securing the fields as a public open space. This story rests on the authority of the American lady, Miss Ellen Chase, who worked with Octavia in Deptford, and who, on returning to Massachusetts, carried out the same principles in the management of houses in her own country.<sup>54</sup>

This anecdote shows how her domestic visiting of the poor framed Hill's interest in open spaces as well as women's desire to extend the limits of the domestic sphere through the moral stewardship of English landscape. While the preservation of open spaces beyond the city became the primary focus of the National Trust, Hill always labored to convert local urban space and make it open to the public, as her "securing" of Hilly Fields indicates. Acutely aware that the city was not amenable to individual gardens on a large scale, Hill struggled to secure places like the Quaker Burial Ground as local playgrounds where children could avoid accidents in the street and "play in the garden till parents or elders fetched them."<sup>55</sup>

In addition to safety, the urban playground was also a place to inculcate an appreciation for the countryside in the residents' children through colorful murals and games. In an 1879 letter to one of her trainees, Mary Harrison, Hill writes enthusiastically about the moral health benefits of murals depicting Nature and animal life at Freshwater Place. Hill's letter also describes how the playground is used as an outdoor classroom where she and her sister Miranda read to adolescent girls and oversee their needlework while also looking after the youngest children: "Some of the dear little tots kept running past crying to the swallows and butterflies painted on the wall, 'I'll catch you bird,' 'I'll catch you butterfly.'" <sup>56</sup> Another letter demonstrates how organized "field days" improve the tenants' children's behavior: "The children enjoyed their *field* day very much, I think, and kept asking, 'Wasn't it nice on Saturday?' with such a little hug of your hand! I was so pleased with one child, who I *knew*, in the midst of amusing herself, simply to give me pleasure, came away to me with, "Won't Miss like to have a game of six acres of land?" <sup>57</sup>

As Hill's descriptions of the playgrounds and field days to the countryside suggest, these were also spaces where she and her trainees could introduce supervised pleasures associated with a healthy home life. Often arranging elaborate May-pole celebrations, tea parties, and concerts for their tenants, women use the public park or open spaces or a "field day" to the country as a means to extend the home's nurturing and protective function to the city. As her account of a tenants party at Hillside details,

We walked across the fields some seventy strong, but they seemed nothing in those wide, free meadows. The boys went with Mr. Morley, who brought his dog and sent him into the water. The children ran and sang and made merry: the women enjoyed the bright air and quiet . . . Gertrude had had trusses of straw put in a sort of tier of benches up by the summer house, dry and warm, and soft and comfortable. The children had tea there . . . The elders had tea at the same time in

the garden on the lawn. We were very strong in entertainers. The people were delighted with the garden, the field, the house. The boys played cricket with the gentlemen; everyone was amused, and happy, and good.<sup>58</sup>

Yet it was not just children whose pleasure and leisure Hill and her lady visitors sought to domesticate, but also the workmen's home lives. Her account of Red Cross Hall, a collection of model cottages with a community garden she created by using the abandoned paper factory on the site as fertilizer, happily reports the men's cultivation of the garden: "It was very nice to talk to the men, and see their great delight in watching the growth of the trees and creepers and plants":

I must say their spirit was very good. The only thing was they would not listen to any speakers on the other side, tho' asked to do so by their chairman—evidently a popular man; and tho' several of the audience said, "Give the man a hearing," but the desire to gain the park even at the increase of rates, was very strong, quite unmistakable; also the warm way in which they responded to a speaker who described the temptation to drink, of people who had been sleeping and working in impure air, and who said that drink really took more strength out than it put in. "What is the best tonic after labour?" asked he—and many voices shouted "Fresh air, fresh air." In fact I thought the Temperance view of the question excited more enthusiasm than any other, except the good the park would do to the children.<sup>59</sup>

Miranda's letter emphasizes the moral influence of open spaces and their employment as alternative sites to the pub for workmen's leisure time.

Miranda's observations also underscore middle-class anxieties about open spaces for the working classes. In the essay, "Space for the People," that concludes her *Homes of the London Poor* (1875), Hill attempts to solve the problem of "pauperising" the poor through the provision of open spaces, a "common gift" that many reforming Victorians feared would not be maintained by its recipients: "The house is an individual possession, and should be worked for, but the park or the common which a man shares with his neighbors, which descends as a common inheritance from generation to generation, surely this must be given without pauperising."<sup>60</sup> In her justification for the "common

gift" of open spaces, Hill conceives common lands to be an "inheritance," and therefore a kind of private property that will ensure social continuity and stability.

Thus, she eases middle-class anxieties about public property and the poor's misuse of it by insisting on the potentially private and domestic nature of open spaces, on the ability of these spots of color and light to inculcate the middle-class values of self-discipline and self reliance just as the cottage garden affords space to stretch domestic resources and provide healthy forms of leisure like gardening and caring for pets. The benefits of open spaces, "the quiet influence of Nature," therefore, are associated with those of the domestic sphere, in which privacy affords solitude and reflection.<sup>61</sup> While accounts of Hill's philosophy of open space tend to stress the association of the country with health for a city plagued by sanitation problems and disease, she focuses on its psychological and spiritual benefits as well. Her intimacy with the cramped courts of East London and its residents shapes her gardenesque aesthetic and redefines it in terms of the spatial realities of the urban poor, and the lack of space, light, air, and color in their homes and courts. Referring to the crowding, heat, and agitation of East London's courts during the summer, she suggests not just the importance of physical space, but the psychic necessity of having access to quiet, country spaces that provide solace and repose:

Sometimes on a hot summer evening in such a court when I am trying to calm excited women shouting their execrable language at one another, I have looked up suddenly and seen one of those bright gleams of light the summer sun sends out just before he sets catching the top of a red chimney pot, and beautiful there, though too directly above their heads for the crowd below to notice it much. But to me it brings sad thought of the fair and quiet places far away, where it is falling softly on tree, and hill, and cloud, and I feel as if that quiet, that beauty, that space, would be more powerful to calm the wild excess about me than all my frantic striving with it.<sup>62</sup>



She sees the cultivation of small open spaces within the city as a more effective cure for "wild excess" than her own "passionate efforts at reform."<sup>63</sup> Of course, as S. Martin Gaskell argues in his study of public parks over the long nineteenth century, these are not "open" spaces at all; rather, they are structured spaces conceived for the purpose of educating the working classes in the rational pleasures of the outdoors and healthy exercise. While certainly in favor of a healthy, industrious work force, Hill also advocates providing the benefits of privacy and domesticity generally afforded only to the middle and upper classes by the suburban garden, environments that encourage solitude, quiet, and reflection, which she saw as essential to survival in the city as well as to quell urban unrest.

Ultimately, Hill believes that open spaces in London should provide the benefits of home and bourgeois domesticity to the poor, quiet, protected spots for rest and reflection. Hill claims that "places to sit in... might be really very small, so that they were pretty and bright," thus stressing the arrangement and choice of gardenesque outdoor rooms scattered throughout the city.<sup>64</sup> Reflecting women's expertise and intimate experience with the domestic sphere and the indoors, she uses the language of the home and its interior to describe the potential amenities of outdoor space. Referring to the popularity of Leicester Square, she believes

such places must be made bright, pretty, and neat—a small place which is not so becomes painfully dreary, and it is quite curious to notice how little one feels shut in when the barriers are lovely, or contain beautiful things which the eye can rest on. The small enclosed leads which too often bound the view of a back dining room in London oppress one like a prison; but a tiny cloistered court of the same size will give a sense of repose.<sup>65</sup>

Her emphasis on the necessity of such spaces in close walking distance of their homes, thus, reflects the ideological grounds of the gardenesque for women, which was to extend

the confines of the domestic sphere to the outdoors for the social good through subtle methods of social control. As the passage suggests, gardens have a soporific effect on the poor, mitigating the oppressive nature of poverty and the urban environment. Of course, this principle is manifested quite differently in the context of the crowded urban center, where, in the minds of most reforming Victorians, domesticity itself, the antidote to urban chaos and class anxiety, was most severely challenged. It is the dirty, cramped, grayness of the city that makes a gardenesque aesthetic, a home life that productively meets the challenges of industrialization, the creation of "lovely outdoor sitting rooms," all the more crucial to the poor's improvement and survival.

By the time Hill published her essay, "Colour, Space, and Music for the People," in 1884, she was not just intimately familiar with central, East and South London and its poorest homes; she was also an experienced, thoughtful observer of the city and its environs as a complex and heterogeneous landscape. Indeed, it is her urban travelling conducted with a sympathetic interest in the improvement of domestic condition that provides her with a platform for embracing the Victorian belief in the utility of beauty for a modern, humanitarian purpose. Thus, more than claiming a feminine expertise in domestic management, she extends the domestic focus on the cultivation of the individual from the home itself to the city. Not content with improving homes and courts, she believed the city as a whole should vital provide resources for the poorest of its citizen, sites and tools for enjoyment of the arts as well as physical, outdoor recreation.

Thus, Hill's belief in aesthetics as a basis for citizenship and extending citizenship insists on the introduction of color and music indoors and out, and thereby resists simplistic or unitary notions of domestic space defined in terms of interior and exterior

space. If her essay refers to the city's aesthetic production as "secondary arts," i.e. as supplemental to the making of the individual by the domestic sphere, her eloquence about the city's domestic conditions revises and undercuts such a hierarchy, one that presupposes the inviolable separation of private and public, as well as rural and urban space.

In her desire to reconstruct the cityscape in terms of domestic principles, Hill's appeal to her middle-class readers' sympathy insists on the mutually beneficial nature of the countryside and bourgeois home-making. Yet this interdependence is intended to elicit from her readers the desire to share rather than hoard the treasures of the countryside and the freedom of mind and body that they evoke:

Think those of you who have had any country life as children, how early the wild flowers earned your delight; remember . . . the bright colour of flag, or dress, or picture was; recall the impression of concerted music when first its harmonies reached you; live over again the glad burst out of doors into any open space where you could breathe and move freely; trace onward from earliest childhood, what in developed forms, these gifts of nature, colour, painting, music, and open space have been, and then; summoning before you the scene you best remember in poor London—I will not describe any—picture it for yourself this time—resolve whether you will try for your part henceforward silently, but steadily to send there something of all the splendour, brightness, harmony, you gather round you in your London homes.<sup>66</sup>

This passage illustrates the degree to which the countryside had become an aesthetic, an abstracted set of principles that could be brought to the middle-class home in the city or its suburbs by a proprietress with a moralized sympathy and taste for rural pleasures. For Hill, a healthy home life is achieved through "gifts of nature" assimilated and concentrated in aesthetic terms. Finally, she makes her appeal for improving London in terms of gardenesque principles by appealing to a middle-class, feminine tradition of landscape that is directed by the interests of the domestic sphere.

Octavia Hill, Anti-Suburban Sentiment, and the National Trust

We in London have to share our garden, perhaps England itself will learn to share some of its gardens."

--Octavia Hill, Address to Newnham College students<sup>67</sup>

Eventually, the Kyrle's Society's subcommittee on Open Spaces preservation and its goal to procure the commons as a resource for "the people" and their improvement led to the establishment of a civil institution that Hill intended to name "The Commons and Gardens Trust" but was to become known as The National Trust in 1895. Thus, while passionate about the accessibility of open air within the metropolis, Hill was also dedicated to preserving fields and commons beyond the city's confines for the specific use of the working classes. In the following passage she argues that the appreciation of vista and the enjoyment of prospect are more crucial to the working man than the suburbanite because of the distance he must travel and the precious little leisure time allotted to enjoy them.

Worried about the "Acres of Villas!" and "sea of houses" encroaching on Hampstead Heath, she describes the landscape's benefits to the poor:

There the May still grows; there thousands of buttercups crown the slope with gold; there best of all, as you ascend, the hills lift you out of it, even when houses are built around, for far away the view stretches over blue distances to the ridge where Windsor stands. As you come home, yes, as your children's children come home -- if you save the fields from being built over now will be seen from them the great sun going down, with all his clouds about him . . . London lying hushed below you—even London hushed for you for a few minutes, so far it lies beneath—though you will be in it for a short ten minutes.<sup>68</sup>

From a maternalist point of view, Hill, in her insistence on the vista and prospect for the workman's pleasure, also appeals to the philanthropist's desire to domesticate the city, to have it "hushed" like a quiet child in the nursery, a measurable expanse to be surveyed

and managed for the social good. Thus, while her philanthropy has often been couched as conservative in terms of its distinction between the good and the intractable poor and an ideological aversion to material relief without moral encouragement, as a middle-class woman and advocate of domestic improvement she is quite anti-suburban in her open space philosophy. She maintained that the commodity of open air was more precious to city dwellers, especially in the South and East Ends, than the suburbanites whose developments were often in competition for the same lands.

Ultimately, Hill's innovative aesthetic locates the countryside as a site for abstracting qualities of or associated with Nature most suited to the human condition, essences that could be imported and adapted to the most urban locations and conditions. Her adoption of a feminine method of reform, in which she believed sympathy and individual relationships with her tenants to be crucial modes of management, has obscured the radical and highly nuanced nature of her aesthetics. Octavia Hill saw the garden as a crucial site for improving the domestic lives of her urban tenants, believing the smallest of garden plots could provide solace and repose in the midst of London's greyest, most cramped courts; on a broader scale, she maintained that the garden and green spaces within the city would inculcate the middle-class values of individuality, taste, and domestic productivity in the poorest of families. Thus, historical and biographical accounts have overlooked the extent to which her appreciation for landscape and gardening influenced her tutelary relationship to London's poor, as well as the extent to which these activities shaped and enabled Victorian women's participation in the social sphere over the course of the long nineteenth century.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Octavia Hill, *Octavia Hill: Early Ideals*, ed. Emily S. Maurice, London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1928.

<sup>2</sup> Octavia Hill, *Homes of the London Poor (1875)*, Frank Cass & Co. LTD, 1970, 45.

<sup>3</sup> Hill, *Homes of the London Poor*, 33.

<sup>4</sup> Octavia Hill, *Life of Octavia Hill as told in her Letters*, ed. C. Edmund Maurice, London Macmillan & Co., 1913, 111.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. Patricia Ingham, Penguin, 1995, 134.

<sup>6</sup> Hill, *Octavia Hill: Early Ideals*, 24.

<sup>7</sup> Gillian Darley, *Octavia Hill*. London: Constable and Company Limited, 1990, 145.

<sup>8</sup> Darley, *Octavia Hill*, 179-80.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Gaskell, "Gardens for the Working Class: Victorian Practical Pleasure," *Victorian Studies* 23: 4 (1980): 479-501; and H.L. Malchow, "Public Gardens and Social Action in Late Victorian England," *Victorian Studies*, 29:1 (1985): 97-104.

<sup>10</sup> H. L. Malchow in "Public Gardens" quotes F.M.L. Thompson, *Hampstead: Building a Borough, 1650-1964*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, to support his thesis that public gardens perform the same ideological function of class control as more institutionalized spaces like prisons, schools, hospitals, asylums, etc.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Whelan, "Introduction," in *Octavia Hill and the Social Housing Debate: Essays and Letters by Octavia Hill*. London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1998, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Qtd. in Whelan, *Octavia Hill and the Social Housing Debate*, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Whelan, "Introduction," 6.

<sup>14</sup> Hill, "Four Years' Management of a London Court," *Homes of the London Poor (1875)*, Frank Cass & Co. LTD, 1970.

<sup>15</sup> Octavia Hill, *Homes*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Malchow, "Public Gardens," 97.

<sup>17</sup> Gaskell, "Gardens for the Working Class," 481.

<sup>18</sup> Pamela Gilbert, "Producing the Public: Public Medicine in Private Spaces," *Medicine, Health, and the Public Sphere in Britain, 1600-2000*, ed. S. Sturdy, London: Routledge, 2002: 43-59.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Nancy Boyd's *Three Victorian Women who changed their World: Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill, Florence Nightingale*. 235-236. Florence Nightingale 'A Note of Interrogation', *Fraser's Magazine*, New Series, 7 (May 1873), 567.

<sup>20</sup> Gillian Darley's biography, *Octavia Hill: A Life*, includes Florence Nightingale's speculation that Hill was a model for George Eliot's *Middlemarch* heroine. Eliot and her husband were admirers and contributors to the philanthropist's causes to improve the domestic lives of the urban poor.

<sup>21</sup> Octavia Hill, "Landlords and Tenants," *Homes of the London Poor* (1875), Frank Cass & Co. LTD, 1970, 39.

<sup>22</sup> Octavia Hill, "Landlords and Tenants," 39.

<sup>23</sup> Octavia Hill, "Landlords and Tenants," 39.

<sup>24</sup> Octavia Hill, "Landlords and Tenants," 39.

<sup>25</sup> Octavia Hill, "Landlords and Tenants," 42

<sup>26</sup> Octavia Hill, "Management of a London Court," in *Homes of the London Poor*, 31.

<sup>27</sup> Octavia Hill, "Landlords and Tenants," 42.

<sup>28</sup> Octavia Hill, "Landlords and Tenants," 46.

<sup>29</sup> Octavia Hill, "Landlords and Tenants," 42.

<sup>30</sup> Octavia Hill, Extract from the "Letter to My Fellow-Workers: Work among the Poor During 1884 & 1885." *Octavia Hill and the Social Housing Debate: Essays and Letters by Octavia Hill*, ed. Robert Whelan, London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1998. 90.

<sup>31</sup> Octavia Hill, "Letter to My Fellow-Workers," 90.

<sup>32</sup> Octavia Hill, *Octavia Hill and the Social Housing Debate*, 90.

<sup>33</sup> Octavia Hill, *Octavia Hill and the Social Housing Debate*, 109.

<sup>34</sup> Octavia Hill, *Octavia Hill and the Social Housing Debate*, 90.

<sup>35</sup> Octavia Hill, *Early Experiences*, 64.

<sup>36</sup> C. Edmund Maurice, ed. *Life of Octavia Hill as Told in her Letters*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1913, 4.

<sup>37</sup> C. Edmund Maurice, ed. *Life of Octavia Hill*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> C. Edmund Maurice, ed. *Life of Octavia Hill*, 5.

<sup>39</sup> Boyd, 238.

<sup>40</sup> C. Edmund Maurice, ed. *Life of Octavia Hill*, 14.

<sup>41</sup> C. Edmund Maurice, ed. *Life of Octavia Hill*, 14.

<sup>42</sup> C. Edmund Maurice, ed. *Life of Octavia Hill*, 538.

<sup>43</sup> C. Edmund Maurice, ed. *Life of Octavia Hill*, 368.

<sup>44</sup> C. Edmund Maurice, ed. *Life of Octavia Hill*, 368.

<sup>45</sup> Octavia Hill, *Life of Octavia Hill*, 436.

<sup>46</sup> Octavia Hill, *Life of Octavia Hill*, 437.

<sup>47</sup> Octavia Hill, *Life of Octavia Hill*, 433.

<sup>48</sup> Octavia Hill, *Life of Octavia Hill*, 434.

<sup>49</sup> Octavia Hill writes of the second group of houses Ruskin purchased for her at Freshwater Place, Marylebone in "Four Years Management of a London Court, in *The Social Housing Debate*, Ed. Robert Whelan, "Mr. Ruskin, to whom the whole undertaking owes its existence, has had the trees planted in the playground, and creepers against the houses. In May, we have a May-pole or a throne covered with flowers for the May-queen and her attendants. The sweet luxuriance of the spring flowers is more enjoyed in the court than would be readily believed. Some months after the first festival the children were sticking a few faded flowers into a crevice in the wall, saying they wanted to make it 'like it was the day we had the May-pole'" (56).

<sup>50</sup> John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, London: Henry Altemus, 1871, 140.

<sup>51</sup> Octavia Hill, "Colour, Space, and Music for the People," *Nineteenth Century*, 15:87 (May 1884): 741-52. Hill's own insistence on the feminine, domestic nature of beauty in her passionate allegiance to the decorative arts has also contributed to the marginalization of her artistic vision.



<sup>52</sup> In his study of late nineteenth-century public gardens and social action, H.L. Malchow characterizes the Kyrle Society's mission as "diffusely philanthropic" and ineffective, due in part to its focus on "individual good works" (109). Yet this reading of the society marginalizes the participants themselves who he refers to as "middle-class women with time on their hands," overlooks the deep-seated nature and influence of the gardenesque in the fashioning of middle-class women's subjectivity, and obscures their contributions to philanthropic efforts, class relations, and the changing perceptions of urban and domestic life. Using the gardenesque aesthetic, the Society brought the country to the city in the form of decorative and creative arts, skills no doubt taken for granted as belonging to the domestic sphere and relegated to a dilettantish circle of ladies' concerns by contemporary critics.

<sup>53</sup> Gillian Darley, *Octavia Hill*, 181.

<sup>54</sup> C. Edmund Maurice, ed. *Life of Octavia Hill*, 441.

<sup>55</sup> C. Edmund Maurice, ed. *Life of Octavia Hill*, 472.

<sup>56</sup> C. Edmund Maurice, ed. *Life of Octavia Hill*, 388-89.

<sup>57</sup> C. Edmund Maurice, ed. *Life of Octavia Hill*, 390.

<sup>58</sup> C. Edmund Maurice, ed. *Life of Octavia Hill*, 447-48.

<sup>59</sup> Octavia Hill, *Life of Octavia Hill*, 478.

<sup>60</sup> Octavia Hill, *Homes*, 90.

<sup>61</sup> Octavia Hill, *Life of Octavia Hill*, 269.

<sup>62</sup> Octavia Hill, *Homes*, 90.

<sup>63</sup> Octavia Hill, *Homes*, 90.

<sup>64</sup> Octavia Hill, *Homes*, 90.

<sup>65</sup> Octavia Hill, *Homes*, 91.

<sup>66</sup> Octavia Hill, "Colour, Space, and Music for the People," 742.

<sup>67</sup> Address to Newnham College students, March 1898 [Ouvry papers]. Qtd. in Gillian Darley, 181.

<sup>68</sup> Octavia Hill, *Homes*, 93.

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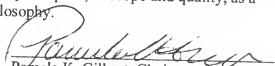
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### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born in Charleston, South Carolina, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1969, Michelle Sipe grew up in rural Florida where her mother cultivated her own landscape, a passion that inspired her daughter's dissertation project. In 1992, Michelle Sipe earned a bachelor's in English from Barnard College at Columbia University in New York, New York. In 1998, she received a master's in English from the University of Florida.

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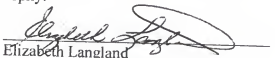
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Associate Professor of History

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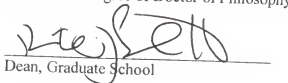
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Phillip Wegner  
Associate Professor of English

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

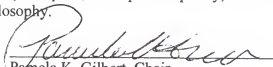
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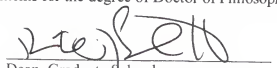
  
Elizabeth Langland  
Dean, Division of Humanities, Arts and  
Cultural Studies, College of Letters &  
Sciences  
University of California, Davis

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Phillip Wegner  
Associate Professor of English

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